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The New York Review of Science Fiction

Number Thirty-Two
April 1991
\$2.50

Donald G. Keller The Manner of Fantasy

Fantasy is now a successful commercial category, which means of course that what has sold already—i.e. mostly product written to formula—determines what is published next. Nevertheless, good books with some originality do appear, though they are often difficult to find amid the welter of similarly-packaged product. They also share the common fate in the present bookselling economy of short shelf-life: if you don't happen to notice them immediately, you may miss them entirely. None of the writers here considered has reached the bestseller status of Stephen Donaldson or David Eddings or even Katherine Kurtz, and thus their books, fine as they are, remain obscure; it takes detective work to keep up with their careers.

As a group, these writers are characteristic of a trend in fantasy writing which has not been heretofore pinpointed, drowned out by the noise of commercial bestsellerdom pervading fantasy publishing as it does science fiction publishing; but it has been gathering steam over the last decade, and it is worth closer consideration.

Delia Sherman's *Through a Brass Mirror* was one of the two Ace Fantasy Specials originally bought by ex-Ace editor Terri Windling (the other being Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks*). It draws its inspiration from the traditional ballad "Pamorous Flower of Serving Men," sung in its most complete version by Martin Carthy on his 1972 album *Shewater*. It is the story of Fair Elinor, whose mother sends ruffians to kill Elinor's husband and child while leaving Elinor alive. The latter then disguises herself as a young man, goes to court, and eventually becomes the king's chamberlain before her identity is discovered and her mother's crime avenged. This tale has captured the imagination of a whole generation of fantasy writers: Ellen Kushner later made use of it in *Thomas the Rhymer*, and here fellow Boston writer Sherman gives it an entire book's space. She allows the inevitably terse ballad narrative to grow and expand, carefully tending it into a three-branched narrative: the central tale of William Flower the king's favorite servant; the life-story of young Elinor, up until her tragedy; and the story of Margaret the sorcerer, Elinor's natural mother, who has genuine, if twisted, motivations for her actions.

Sherman's debut is not a long book, but it is a rich one; we find ourselves in the kingdom of Albion, where a *Distant Mirror* atmosphere prevails. King Lionel mourns the death of his comrade-at-arms in a border skirmish; contemplates bleakly his coming marriage of state; and finds the company of his chamberlain strangely comforting. Meanwhile Margaret the sorceress rages against the prophecy of her fiery death, which naught she can do—plagues, necromancy, murder—will forestall. And we see fey young Elinor, left as a foundling, who discovers her magical powers, and marries the poor knight whose name she later takes. Sherman weaves the strands together in a way that keeps our interest in each, and paces them to a braided culmination. And then, the ballad over, the story as given at an end, Sherman audaciously replaces the implicit fairy tale ending with a surprising but much more psychologically believable conclusion.

The prose style of the novel is elaborate and varied. Sherman is conversant with the diction of her chosen era: dialect and colloquial

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In this issue

Donald G. Keller counsels fantasists
to mind their manners

James Morrow fires off a snappy
salute *When the Music's Over*

John Clute braves the terrors of *The SFWA Handbook*

Michael Swanwick relishes Terry Bisson's boiled frogs

John J. Ordover is a-mazed by Robert Sheckley

Gwyneth Jones tries *Machine Sex*

Plus reviews of *Leiber*, *Simmons*, and *Sheckley*; more on
Wolfe and *Le Guin*; and the govt-ed relics of St. Pugley

James Morrow

A Review of

When the Music's Over

A Benefit Anthology edited by Lewis Shiner

New York: Bantam Spectra, 1991; \$4.99; 320 pages

"Artistic quality depends upon a work's internal, formal, organic character, upon its structure and its style, and not upon the morality it is presumed to recommend."

So wrote novelist William Gass under the heading "Goodness Knows Nothing of Beauty" in the April 1987 issue of *Harper's*.

He went on: "I think it is one of the artist's obligations to create as perfectly as he or she can, not regardless of all other consequences, but in full awareness, nevertheless, that in pursuing other values—in championing Israel or fighting for women or defending the faith or exposing capitalism or speaking for your race—you may simply be putting a saving scientific, religious, political false face on your failure as an artist."

It's tempting to throw one's wholehearted support behind such sentiments. Who wants to be thought capable of confusing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Jungle* with art? But the more I ponder Gass's grandiose motto—the longer I consider the notion that goodness knows nothing of beauty—the less I am prepared to accept it. The assorted moralities that *Huckleberry Finn*, 1984, *Catch-22*, and *All Quies on the Western Front* are "presumed to recommend," it seems to me, are not collateral niceties but their *raison d'être*. The "other values" of *Madame Bovary* or *Lolita* or *The Stranger*—in these cases, the values implicit in a repudiation of bourgeois values—are precisely, I suspect, what fired their authors to fashion these novels in the first place.

About a year after Gass's essay appeared, Robert Stone employed the pages of *Harper's* in a rebuttal, asking, "Is it possible to postulate the idea of a successful novel about people, or about animals for that matter, in which the living of life, as reflected therein, exists beyond the signal area of moral reference points?" Stone was, of course, quick to distinguish producers of authentic moral fiction from writers who allow

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"Cockeyed, off-center stuff
well worth the neck- and mind-stretching
required to read it."

MICHAEL BISHOP

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commercial or political considerations to vulgarize, conventionalize, or override their perceptions. "It must be emphasized that the moral imperative of fiction provides no excuse for smug moralizing, religiosity, or propaganda. On the contrary, it forbids them. Nor does it require that every writer equip his work with some edifying message advertising progress, brotherhood, and light. It does not require a writer to be a good man, only a good wizard."

Although the eighteen stories that constitute *When the Music's Over* do not, on the whole, aspire to be works of high literary art, this valuable and subversive anthology nevertheless raises the same issues as the Gass-Stone debate: at what point do good intentions compromise a story's worth *qua* fiction? When do fervor and ideological commitment become the enemies of truth?

Lewis Shiner is quite explicit about the extra-aesthetic agenda of *When the Music's Over* (not the title I would have chosen, despite my affection for the Doors). "I asked each of [the contributors] to write a story in which conflict—any kind of conflict—was resolved without violence. Without a 'good guy' beating up or shooting a 'bad guy.' " The editor makes no secret of his contempt for Jerry Pourmelle's popular *There Will Be War* anthologies (which, if you haven't heard, feature the sort of glib mayhem that gives fascism a bad name), and he merrily directs our attention to Tove's forthcoming stonement for this series, Harry Harrison and Bruce McAllister's *There Will Be Peace*. And this truly is a "benefit anthology," for the editor plans to donate his share of the earnings to Greenpeace.

Now, it takes but a moment's reflection to realize that Mr. Shiner has set his authors an extraordinarily difficult task. To offer but one example: I am somewhat chagrined to report that in my own published collection of short fiction, each story pays off in either destruction or the promise of destruction (destruction with a moral or satiric point, but destruction all the same). It is a sobering thought that those of us who consciously suffuse our fiction with anti-militarist attitudes may be more dependent on the aesthetics of chaos than we would care to admit.

What's audacious about *When the Music's Over*—audacious and nervy and occasionally frustrating—is not that it defies Gass's ban on

"goodness," but that it goes on to flirt with the kind of moralizing and propaganda Stone so explicitly proscribes. "They don't preach," the editor says of his selections; "they don't offer easy answers," and of course that is exactly wrong: these stories *do* preach, they *do* offer easy answers. But that's the whole point, I think—to give the jingoists a taste of their own nonsense, to counter the lie of efficacious violence with a vision of efficacious compassion, to posit a universe in which diplomacy solves problems for Rambo. What Shiner really seems to be saying, between the lines, is something like, "Yeah, okay, the whole enterprise may make us look naïve, but, hey, why not take the risk? I mean, where *else* is anybody going to hear that war is a disgraceful activity or that rapprochement is better than bloodshed? Certainly not from George Bush or Arnold Schwarzenegger or from the pages of most science fiction. We have the right to rant and scream and grind political axes, damn it."

Since *When the Music's Over* went to press, of course, it has acquired a relevance its creators could not possibly have anticipated. Throughout the autumn of 1990 and the following winter, we witnessed the spectacle of an American president—driven by a need to, as he so eloquently put it, "kick some ass"—deliberately and systematically circumventing the very negotiation process this book celebrates. Needless to say, Shiner and company hark back to a different sort of presidential rhetoric, the rhetoric of Ulysses S. Grant who wrote, "There was never a time when, in my opinion, some way could not be found to prevent the drawing of the sword."

Once we accept the rules of Shiner's game, we're able to take pleasure in stories we might otherwise dismiss as gratuitously unpoetic. Mark L. Van Name's "Burning Up" is the sort of pointed and affable parable that might have resulted from a collaboration between Rod Serling and Mister Rogers. Bruce Sterling's gritty character study, the sophisticated and picaresque "Jim and Irene," climaxes with a verbal rhapsody on the connectedness of all human beings. John Sharkey's searing urban nightmare, "The Prince," postulates that, under the right conditions, certain subspecies of capitalist pig might be made to see the errors of their ways. (One of the fascinating—indeed, touching—

The New York Review of Science Fiction

ISSUE #32 April 1991
Volume 3, No. 8 ISSN #1052-9438

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Published monthly by Dragon Press, P. O. Box 78, Pleasantville NY 10570.

\$2.50 per copy. Annual subscriptions: in U.S., \$24; \$28 Canada; \$32 First Class;

overseas, \$36 (via Air Printed Matter). For overseas air mail, please Inquire. Domestic institutional subscriptions \$28.

Please make checks payable to Dragon Press, and payable in U.S. funds.

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dimensions of *When the Music's Over* is observing desperados like Sterling and Shirley grapple with the idioms of redemption.) Yuri Glazkov's startling "The Mirror Planet"—the volume's only reprint, from the 1988 Soviet anthology *Star Peace*—is that rare achievement, an O. Henry story in which the punch ending serves a serious thematic aim. Unfortunately, the title gives the show away. In Jack McDevitt's entertaining "Date with Destiny," an American ad-man is dragged into the role of Middle Eastern dictator and averts a Persian Gulf war by deploying a most unusual weapon. As with the Glazkov story, the central joke lies buried in the title.

Although Richard Kadrey, in an afterword cataloging the goals, activities, and addresses of various peace groups, terms this book a collection of "alternatives to war," a third of the stories have nothing to do with the fate and folly of nations. "In the Dark" offers Pat Cadigan's grim and carefully cadenced meditation on domestic violence. Marian Henley's illustrated "Smile" depicts her comic-strip heroine Maxine coping with the psychic aftermath of a robbery. The best of the apocalyptic offerings is probably James Blaylock's "Bugs," a portrait of marital alienation that includes the most bizarrely sensual bathtub scene you'll ever read.

Not everyone in Shiner's troupe can handle the peculiar demands of pacifist sf. Wayne Wightman's "Pinal Weapon" and Yoshino Aramaki's "War in the Ponnappe Islands" have an inchoate, schematic quality that makes them seem more like outlines for stories than fully realized dramas. And the reasons for including Sherry Goldsmith's crudely imagined "Caruso" and Walton Simons's coarsely written "One Man's Meat" will have to come from elsewhere than this review.

It was probably inevitable that some of Shiner's players would refuse to follow the rules—these are science fiction writers we're talking about, after all—opting instead to explore the contradictions inherent in the pacifist dream. And so we get Nancy Kress's canny "Peace of Mind," which demonstrates how idealists in possession of a biochemical cure for war might easily become the very thing they hate. We get Walter

Jon Williams's stunning "Prayers on the Wind," a vivid glimpse of a neo-Buddhist world featuring episodes of violence so lurid and baroque—each heralded by the seemingly innocuous, ultimately chilling phrase "Short Path"—as to belie the note of reconciliation on the last page. Most of all we get Robert Anton Wilson's astonishing "Von Neumann's Second Catastrophe"—curiously, the only entry in the volume to wrestle overtly with the problem of evil. In ten pages of impeccable prose, Wilson articulates the fearsome eroticism of organized warfare, ultimately delivering a message that might have functioned equally well in *The Three Wives of War* series, if anyone had the wit to put it there. Of such ambiguities, art is made.

For all I know, by the time you read this, our President's Persian Gulf policies will have been totally vindicated; for all I know, Saddam Hussein and his army will have been successfully slaughtered, the legitimate oligarchy of Kuwait will have been restored, casualties will have stayed at levels acceptable to everyone from the man in the street to Jesus Christ, the Middle East will have become stable and peaceful, our petroleum prerogatives will have been permanently secured, and we'll have figured out how to pay for it all.

But I doubt it. I don't think war works that way. Rather, I think Martin Luther King, Jr. had it right when he said, "The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows. One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal."

And so, as war fever grips the land, as the cheerful robots wave their flags, as our troops sweep across the sands, as the United States of America goes into Chapter 11, I fire off my snappiest, most patriotic salute—not to George Bush and his beautiful war, but to Lewis Shiner and his good book.

James Morrow lives in State College, Pennsylvania. His most recent novel, Only Begotten Daughter, is currently a finalist for the Nebula Award.

The Science Fiction Writers of America Handbook: The Professional Writer's Guide to Writing Professionally edited by Kristine Kathryn Rusch and Dean Wesley Smith

Eugene, Or: Writers Notebook Press: Pulphouse Publishing 1990; \$10.00 wraps; 248 pages
reviewed by John Clute

The dominant tone of this handbook, which is one of terror, is established early on by the sagacious Frederik Pohl. "Sf writers don't spend as much time writing as they used to," he says in "The Science Fiction Professional," a piece whose first publication (1977) is not registered in the copyright notice on the verso of the title page of this book dedicated to the protection of professionals:

They don't have time [he continued back then]. I don't believe I know a single writer who puts in a forty-hour writing week any more, year round. I know many who work longer hours than that, but they are lucky if half the time is actually spent putting real words on paper for publication. The other jobs of the sf professional keep them jumping.

The sf professional, as Pohl said in 1977 and would certainly say now, must be an agent, a lawyer, a PR man, a public performer, an apparition of the fan/writer *gemeinschaft*, a teacher and critic, an editor/proofreader/secretary, a numerate participant in the march of science; and a writer. It is a job description that every contributor to *The SFWA Handbook* confirms with a terrifying semblance of cheer. There is a great deal of information in this compendium, and if none of it, by clear premeditation, relates to the actual job and deliverance—many centuries old—of writing, then that is most probably to the good. Over a great span of years, much has been said about the artist and the thing made; but relatively little about the context in which the made thing becomes a transaction; and the little that has been said has generally been nonsense. For writers whose product can be defined as some sort of sf or fantasy or horror, *The SFWA Handbook* meets a need, then. Though not quite head on.

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In fact, there are a few oddities in the enterprise—quite beyond the genuinely threatening tone a dozen or so advice-tendering articles inevitably establish when absorbed as a whole—not the least of which is the absence of an index. That is indeed odd. Even this reviewer, whose competence with his own small computer is less than total, knows what the Index button on his keyboard will accomplish if he pushes it (it generates an extremely useful *Index*); and one does rather have to wonder why a book so chock-full of well-meant and detailed advice has been designed so that it must be *grazed* through in order to find out anything at all in particular. Information about contracts, for instance, pops up in Damon Knight's piece on "Contracts," where one might expect to find it; but it also appears in "Electronic Publishing: Ten Years Down the Road" (and ten dozen pages down the book) by Greg Bear; and in other places, too. With something of an edge in his voice, Bear deals as well with some implications for contract law of electronic publishing—he sure had me hunting feverishly through the last one I signed—but copyrights as such are dealt with, for the most part, by Richard Curtis and Ellen M. Koszok somewhere up in front. Organization, in other words, conversational. The book is a klatch.

Almost surprisingly—given the number of unpleasant things that have been said about the nature of the jobs which surround the job of writing in 1990—there is hardly a single bad moment in the entire conversation. Dean R. Lambie does tell us on page 40 that some publishers try to get away with "all rights" contracts, and that those writers who fail to object "are not writers; they're amateurs." Not only is he wrong: he's wrong with a strut. "Your future as a writer depends solely on sales," says Jennifer Roberson, stripping the maypole right down to a twig in November. In "Self-Promotion: Crass Commercialism or Just Good Sense," Betsy Mitchell fails to fill the excluded middle

with any presentation of some sense that the main problem with self-promotion, when the entire membership of the SFWA is being adjured to engage in it, might be noise. Susan Schwartz is good-humored about conventions, but some of the information she deals with is intrinsically terrifying. At conventions in the USA—this reviewer retains the relative innocence of emigré status in the Old World—it is for instance apparently the case that the term "program participant" has a legal tax-deductible meaning, a meaning whose ruthless invariance, like a Freemason's handshake, includes only the chosen; members of First Fandom can be identified by "jacket patches" (or else?); and writers go on panels not to engage in the conversation of our species but to sell books. None of this is evil—Schwartz's presentation is, for instance, a perfectly sane vision of a circle of Hell—but it builds. It builds.

It would of course be fatuous to assume that Rusch/Smith expect any single writer this side of hypomania to absorb the entire corpus of advice that has been marshalled in their pages, because that is the road to meltdown. But it builds. The noise of the book builds inexorably—a noise which it is impossible to avoid because, in the absence of an index, everybody is talking at once—and the burden of that noise is something one could get pretty high-toned at deploring. One could

speak of this handbook as an instruction manual for those who wish to become pro-bowl winners at the job of the game of writing—because no one who obeys every operating instruction in the book could dream of doing anything spontaneous, anything that might prove a wrong career move, a failure of address. One could speak of the downside of winning, the cost of agon when the juice falls. If *The SFWA Handbook* is meant to work as a true mirror for the professional writer—one could ask—what has it in fact put countenance to? But none of this territoriality in a teapot is really necessary. It's not the end of the world. Here are some instructions for benefiting from *The Science Fiction Writers of America Handbook*. First construct your own index in the endpapers. Then use this index to consult with those of your fellows who are making good sense—most of the contributors do, as singletons. Take as much advice—the legal and contract talk in particular is almost unfailingly cogent—as you can absorb without becoming Arnold Schwarzenegger. Do not have a mid-life crisis when you forget to use your computer net to advertise your next book. Wear earplugs. ▶

John Clute lives in London, England.

Michael Swanwick Four Short Fiction Reviews

"Over Flat Mountain" by Terry Bisson (*Omnibus*, June 1990) has a bravura of idea at its core. As CD, the truck driver protagonist, long after the reader has already accepted his strangely altered world, explains:

If you ever saw the original Appalachians from the air, they looked like a rug somebody had kicked, with the ridges like long folds running parallel. The theory was that Africa had bumped into the USA a million years ago and folded them up. The Uplift killed that theory. Now they say that the Appalachians were the wrinkles left when the Cumberland Dome collapsed a million years ago—unwrinkled when it rose up again twenty years ago. They say it's not stable, and it's true: If you get out of your truck you can still feel the ground humming through your shoes. Cold fusion, twenty miles down.

Which is a valid, unlikely, and wonderfully brash bit of speculation. The implications of a mountain range so tall it pokes out of the atmosphere are carefully worked out and presented in a series of offhand observations about the weather, the tumbled remains of places like Morgantown, Hendersonville, and Bat Cave, and the mechanics of driving a pressurized truck up a forty-five degree slope and over the top. When CD refers to the vanished towns of his youth, the prose is quietly elegant. There's some very fine writing in here.

Just as Bisson has gained our confidence and admiration, though, he undercuts all with an invention that many a pulpster from the Dawn Age of science fiction would blush to slap down on the plate: Landlobsters.

When the Appalachians uplifted, it either proved or disproved evolution, depending on who you're talking to. One thing it proved was that it doesn't take millions of years for a new species to evolve. The first landlobsters showed up less than six years after the Uplift started, though they weren't nearly as big as the ones today.

The "ones today" are large enough to kill a man. Naturally, there is a climactic battle with a landlobster, and it would be an exciting one if we could for an instant take it seriously.

Because Bisson is of course grinning his head off and letting us know it. Flat Mountain, wonderful as it is, is only backdrop and stage misdirection to the real, quieter, and far more serious story, which begins when CD picks up a hitchhiker:

"Wet out there," he said.

I nodded and popped Ricky Skaggs into the player. I

hadn't picked him up for conversation. I picked him up because I'd done some hitchhiking myself at his age. Sixteen going on twenty-one.

"Appreciate your stopping," he said.

"Nice rig," he said.

For all that CD clearly understands and empathizes with the hitchhiker, in particular the fear and sense of powerlessness that comes from being on the road, he remains largely, and sinisterly, silent. The kid tells CD his name, and CD immediately forgets it. He rejects everything that makes the kid an individual.

What makes this peculiar is that the narrative voice tells us that CD is an amiable and generous guy. He is also, we infer, a good family man. There are unfocused and loving mentions of his wife and daughters, just enough to let us know he has no male offspring. And this is his hidden agenda.

He's looking for a son.

The hitchhiker, in his turn, is literally looking for his father. It's a common enough thing to do, and having been through it himself, CD knows that it's a quest doomed to failure. The actual father is gone, and the metaphorical father (in CD's case a Mexican truck driver) will only be recognized in hindsight. In fact, CD has been through everything the kid is facing now, and there's a lot he could share, if it were only possible.

But, he narrates, at a truck stop, "I bought two hamburgers out of the machine, even though I had already eaten, and acted like I didn't want one of them. That's the way you have to do with a kid like that." This principle extends right down to the ground, and on a gut level, they both understand it: Manhood must be claimed; it cannot be given.

It is not for the hitchhiker's benefit, though, that CD has set up a situation exactly paralleling his own experience with the Mexican. After the kid has proved himself in the huggermugger battle with the landlobster, stolen a valuable gun from the truck's glove compartment, and disappeared into America, CD is free to make peace with himself.

Years before, CD stole a similarly valuable pistol from the Mexican, a man he knew only briefly, feared without reason, and recognized too late for reconciliation. By passing on the incendiary gun, he's not only paying an old debt but proving to himself that his betrayal was understood and forgiven.

Which is as elegant a statement as could be wished about the relationship between fathers and sons, a subject that is as large and looming a mystery as Flat Mountain, and as untidy.

"The Coon Suit" by Terry Bisson (*POSF*, May 1991) consists almost entirely of an elaborate, suggestive buildup, hinting at larger things, which is developed at length and ends abruptly in an absurd denouement. That is to say, it's a shaggy dog story. This is a prose form rarely seen in print, and even more seldom reviewed. But it's worth

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looking at it for no other reason than to examine two of the characteristic strengths of the author. First is the craft and precision of his observation. Here, from his description of the beginning of a coon hunt, when the caged raccoon is pulled across a pond on a rope while the hounds swim after it:

The situation wasn't fair, though, because whenever the dogs fell behind, the man pulling the rope would stop pulling and let them catch up. While the cage was moving the coon was okay, but as soon as it stopped he would go crazy. He would jump from side to side, trying to get it going again, while the hounds paddled closer and closer. Dogs when they're swimming are all jaws. Then the man would pull on the rope and the cage would take off again toward the trees on the other side, and I could almost see the coon get that smirk on his face again. That aviator look.

Bisson knows his territory, and writes about it clearly, sympathetically, without condescension. Which ties into his second characteristic strength.

Television has enforced a sort of Midwestern anchorperson neutral accent on this country; and this is the voice in which most prose is now written. Bisson's narrative voice, however, has a sweet inner music, that sly Southern smoothness written from the inside out not to baroque effect but for the lean economy with which it conveys information.

On the bank the men leaned against their trucks drinking beer and watching. They all wore versions of the same hat, drove versions of the same truck, and looked like versions of the same guy. Not that I think I'm better than them; I'm just not much of a hunter and don't care for dogs.

There are whopping great dollops of characterization and time-and-place setting in that brief passage, delivered not so much by what is said but by the spin that is put on the phrasing. It is this mastery of voice that allows Bisson to bring his stories in at the lengths he does. Most writers would require a lot more wordage.

I should mention that "The Coon Suit" is also a good shaggy dog story. It made me laugh, anyway.

"The Two Janets" by Terry Bisson (*IASFM*, November 1990) starts out determined to be a shaggy dog story and almost immediately outgrows the mold. The first Janet is a young woman who has left Owensboro, Kentucky, for New York City in order to break into publishing. Her mother, who has the uncanny ability to reach her by randomly dialing pay phones, calls to tell her that John Updike has moved to her home town.

She is skeptical at first, suspecting a ploy to lure her back. But it's true, and in short order, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, E. L. Doctorow, and William Styron also move into her old neighborhood. Only the first Janet, who is struggling as an office temp and came to New York City with the dream of hobnobbing with exactly this ilk of literary gent, sees the oddness of this development.

"Wait a minute," I said. This was getting out of hand. "How come no women writers ever move to Owensboro? What about Ann Tyler? Or Alice Walker? Or Bobbie Ann Mason, who is actually from Mayfield (not that far away)? How come they're all men, and all these old guys?"

"I suppose you expect me to ask them that!" Mother said. "I only found out the author of *Catcher in the Rye* moved here because Mr. Roth told Reverend Curtis."

But by slow degrees (and Bisson boils this frog with so perfect a sense of timing it never even blinks) she comes to accept the entire situation. In conversation with the second Janet, her best friend who has stayed behind, she learns that the author of *Bright Lights, Big City* has also moved.

"McInerney," I said. "Jay McInerney. Are you sure?" I didn't want to say it because it sounded so snobbish, but Jay

McInerney didn't exactly seem Owensboro caliber.

"Of course I'm sure. He looks just like Michael J. Fox. I saw him walking down at that little park by the river. You know, the one where Norman Mailer hangs out."

"Norman Mailer. I didn't know he lived in Owensboro," I said.

"Why not?" Janet said. "A lot of famous writers make Owensboro their home."

There are two literalisms at work here. The first is *reductio ad absurdum* of the smug old truism that whatever you journey into the outside world to seek can be found Right Back Home. Even, presumably, John Updike. The second is an externalization of the split between the adventurous and stay-at-home sides of the heroine. For while Bisson is careful to establish that the second Janet is a real and distinct individual, we also learn that she keeps the protagonist's mother company and that the first Janet's dear ex-fiancé would just as gladly marry her instead. The intent seems clear enough.

Anyone who ever left a small town in search of something bigger—most of us—will find this a spooky story, even a threatening one in part. But it ends on a surprisingly redemptive note, strangeness collapsed to mundane warmth, that leaves the narrative quietly, hopefully opened.

There is also a cameo appearance by one of science fiction's own. Exactly the right one, too.

"Bears Discover Fire" by Terry Bisson (*IASFM*, August 1990) is, let's get the superlatives out of the way right up front, as good as anything you'll encounter this year and a story that will not be exhausted by a single reading, no matter how careful. It's an early call, but I think I'm safe to make it: This is already one of the best genre stories of the decade, and an encouraging omen of what we might expect from the Nineties.

The closest I can come to describing the feel of this work is that it reads like it was written by the mutant child on Flannery O'Connor by R. A. Lafferty. The plot is simple. It begins when the protagonist, driving with his brother Wallace and nephew Wallace Jr., has a flat tire. While he is fixing it, two bears emerge from the woods, holding torches.

I fished the lug nuts out of the hubcap and spun them on. I usually like to put a little oil on them, but this time I let it go. I reached under the car and let the jack down and pulled it out. I was relieved to see that the spare was high enough to drive on. I put the jack and the lug wrench and the flat into the trunk. Instead of replacing the hubcap, I put it in there too. All this time, the bears never made a move. They just held the torches up, whether out of curiosity or helplessness, there was no way of knowing. It looked like there may have been more bear behind them, in the trees.

Opening three doors at once, we got into the car and drove off. Wallace was the first to speak. "Looks like bears have discovered fire," he said.

This is the fantasy engine that draws us into the story. The narrator himself is most concerned with family matters. His mother is in a nursing home, waiting to die, and Wallace is, despite being a preacher, no fit father for his son. He has bough into material prosperity so deeply he neglects teaching Wallace Jr. such core values as good grammar and auto repair.

Over the course of a few significant days, the narrator—identified once as "Uncle Bobby"—repairs tires, sells crop insurance, visits his mother, and fills the role his brother has neglected, becoming a surrogate father for his nephew. Intermittently, he watches PBS specials on the bears (which negative characters—Wallace, a nurse—do not want to think about), goes out in search of them, and watches their campfires at night. Finally, the mother escapes from the home and goes to join the bears. Uncle Bobby and Wallace Jr. track her down, and sitting together at the campfire (the bears are a gentle, frightening, passive presence), they are with her as she mysteriously dies.

That's it. The bears are a stand-in for mystery touching common lives, as does the mother's death. Natural order is restored, and the

generational torch is passed. There is also some advanced symbolism involving "newberries" which only the bears and possibly the mother as well can eat. But let's try not to schematize and reduce. We are in God country here and must tread softly.

At this point, "Beas Discover Fire" is already a good, solid story. But there are depths. "What'll they think of next?" the mother exclaims on hearing about the bears. To her, a country woman and retired bus driver, it is just another change, one of many that have happened in her life. The bears have come down from the North and live in the median strips of interstates—perhaps, Blisson suggests, our final frontiers, the only space that modernity has left isolated and difficult of access. They are an altered return of the old, the wild, the apt, into a life made difficult by comfort. Their reappearance triggers a shift of loyalty in Wallace Jr. from a father so totally out of touch with the past he changes houses every three months and is morally affronted by the idea of changing a tire, to a man with bedrock values who lives in the rundown old family homestead and has good automotive skills. The social commentary is quietly explicit.

More intriguingly, Uncle Bobby is a man formed by nature and inclination to be a father, as witness how easily he takes over his

brother's neglected role. (Indeed, his first spoken words are, to his nephew, "Here, son, hold the light.") Yet he is, Blisson states at the outset, well past fathering age. He has never married, despite being much the sort of man many women are looking for. Equally clearly (by the behavior of his brother, who is not a tolerant man), he is not homosexual. Why, then, does this strong family man who desires greatly to pass along some fraction of what he has learned to the next generation, have no children of his own? Some unspoken wound lies hidden before the story's opening.

As in "Over Flat Mountain," the story ends with the narrator being made whole. But this time around the healing extends over three generations, their stories dovetailing into one seamless whole. There is much, much more that could be validly dug out of the text, for this is one of those serendipitous works where a good writer has found exactly the right plot to serve his strengths. To dig farther, though, would only make "Beas Discover Fire" sound involved, symbolic, and artificial, where its primary and greatest virtue is that it is quite simply a joy to read.

A beautiful story. ▶

Michael Swanwick's most recent novel is *Stations of the Tide*.

The Leiber Chronicles edited by Martin H. Greenberg

Arlington Heights, IL: Dark Harvest, 1990; \$21.95 trade hc, \$65.00 limited edition; 601 pages
reviewed by Richard A. Lupoff

Subtitled *Fifty Years of Fritz Leiber*, this magnificent collection represents a splendid crown to the career of one of the truly distinguished authors of his generation. Leiber arrived on the fantastic literature scene in 1939, and has been a shining example of his craft ever since.

Originally regarded as a young luminary of the Lovecraft circle (along with his contemporary Robert Bloch), Leiber began almost at once to spread his wings. In short order he proved himself equally at home with hard science fiction, social satire, adventure fantasy, whimsy, and horror. Initially known as a writer of short stories, he also established himself as a first-rate novelist, and over the past half century has continued to produce superbly in both formats.

In his novels as in his short fiction, Leiber has demonstrated versatility. *Gather, Darkman!* (1950) was an almost Heinleinian exhibition of technology masked as the supernatural to control a superstitious society. *Conjure Wife* (1953) stands to this day as a classic novel of witchcraft in a modern, realistic setting. *The Big Time* (1961) was military science fiction with a time-travel motif. *The Wanderer* was a comic disaster novel cast in the mold of Wyllie and Balmer's *When Worlds Collide*. *The Swords of Lankmar* (1968) and *Swords and Desires* (1970) were swordplay-and-sorcery executed with Leiber's unique brand of irony and good humor. *Our Lady of Darknes* (1977) was a return to Lovecraftian horror set in contemporary San Francisco—this, mixed with an achingly honest and accurate self-portrait of an aging, troubled author. And this list is just a sampling.

Leiber may have been shortchanged by fortune, achieving neither the cult status of Heinlein, the literary acclaim of Bradbury, nor the commercial success of Asimov (all members of Leiber's generation). Yet he has won the solid admiration of both his colleagues and his public. His accumulated output is widely read in editions ranging from mass paperbacks and trade editions to scholarly facsimiles and fan-oriented limited editions.

The *Leiber Chronicles* contains some forty-four of his stories, originally published between 1939 ("Two Sought Adventure") and 1983 ("The Curse of the Smalls and the Stars"). The time-line traced by the book is fairly evenly distributed—there are eight stories from the 1940s, eleven from the '50s, twelve from the '60s, and ten from the '70s. Only the 1980s are thinly represented, with just two entries, as Leiber's advancing years and failing eyesight have curtailed his productivity.

The selection of stories is particularly praiseworthy. Leiber never had a "prime period" because he was good from the start and he never slacked off. The opening story of this book is the first of his popular Fafard and Gray Mouser stories, surely the wittiest and most worthy barbarian fantasies ever written, and a constant reproach that the

unaccounted imitators of the late Robert E. Howard's crude Conan stories are regrettably too dense to understand. Which is not to say that Leiber's tales of Lankmar have meaning only in the context of Howard. They are splendid adventure yarns in their own right, laced with wry commentary and cheerful gusto.

Later satires and parodies are also noteworthy. "The Night He Cried" (1953) is Leiber's response to the egregious Mickey Spillane, and is rivalled in merit only by Ed McBain's "Kiss Me, Dudley." On a far more serious note, Leiber's "Coming Attraction," written for the exciting new magazine *Galaxy* in 1950, has proved one of the most searingly effective and predictive comments ever pronounced upon our era.

Skipping forward to 1967, Leiber's "Gonna Roll the Bones" marked a return to fantasy, and is assuredly a candidate for the best-written of all Leiber's shorter works. The mood, the compulsive characterization, and the sheer craftsmanship of the prose, remains breathtaking after a quarter century.

The *Leiber Chronicles* is so good, it's almost an embarrassment of riches. Open at random and you will find nothing but treasure upon treasure. "The Man Who Made Friends With Electricity," a strange cross between contemporary folk tale and modern fable. "The Haunted Future," in which a Stepford-like future of bland sterility is invaded by monsters. "A Pall of Air," one of Leiber's best, a tale of high science fiction reduced to terms of cozy intimacy. "When the Change Winds Blow," a melancholy tale of interplanetary colonists' longing for lost—destroyed—Earth. And the overwhelming "Horrible Imaginings," a story about age, a revisiting of the haunted San Francisco of *Our Lady of Darknes*.

Any fan of Leiber's will have his own favorite story, and if it is omitted from this volume, a small quibble might be in order. So I will mention in passing my own favorite, "Space-Time for Spenglers." But this is nitpicking. One might also have hoped for at least a limited Leiber bibliography and a critical or biographical essay to introduce the book and to place Leiber and his career in the context of his generation. The book is also marred by an excess of typographical errors—none of them disastrous, but distracting nonetheless.

Despite nitpicking over personal favorites, the choice of stories is generally flawless, the presentation is beautiful, the book is a bargain at its price. Nothing but gratitude is due to Leiber for writing these stories; high praise to Martin Greenberg for his work in compiling the book; and plentiful thanks to Dark Harvest for publishing this glittering treasury. ▶

Richard A. Lupoff lives in Berkeley, California.

The Manner of Fantasy

Continued from page 1

speech, alternative spellings, words now obsolete, sentence-structure longer and more involved than current usage. This is not a studied emulation of archaism in the William Morris manner, but older style nonetheless infuses it everywhere:

Gradually, her fingers nimbled, and she began to copy parts of the Boreasian diary and "Margarite" . . . It was a great day when, unaided, she first inscribed "ELINOR FLOURE WRITTE THYS" in large, angled letters like a scattering of twigs. It was a great day, too, when she first wormed a black knight up to Sir William's white-and-scarlet queen and took her captive.

"The two things be alike," she told him once. "Each be like a dance with set and measures ordered, and to miststep be to throw the pattern awry" (p. 139).

It is a flexible style, able to narrate fluidly, report witty dialogue, or rise to a pitch of keening lyricism; and always it maintains its full and particular flavor. *Through a Brassy Mirror* is an unusually accomplished first novel.

Wren to the Rescue is one of the first two titles for Jane Yolen Books, a new young-adult line for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Though Sherwood Smith, a California resident and Mythopoeic Society member, has been writing for many years, this is her first full-fledged novel. Smith not only has a firm grasp of what makes good fantasy, but knows—still remembers!—how the teenage mind works, and the interactions of her young characters—the banter, the roleplaying and fantasizing, the petty insulting nicknames for those they dislike—ring exactly right. Without overt didacticism or moralizing, she confronts these characters with ethical decisions they must make knowing full well what the consequences are going to be; and they make them. Though an adult reader might suspect that all will work out in the end, Smith never telegraphs this during the narrative itself: she concentrates on conveying the characters' state of mind as they live with their decisions.

Smith's handling of magic is individual and carefully thought out: saying, that is, far-seeing on still water or glass; signs that guide the way, perceptible only to those with magical perception; spells of gesture and word that must be carefully memorized. And as in the rest of the book, the characters never use magic as a *deus ex machina*, but only with consequences, even penalties.

The politics and the family relationships of the characters in several countries are of satisfying complexity; in fact, Smith shows considerable talent at suggesting depth and detail to her world which is not necessarily explicit on the page. My only quibble with the book, in fact, is that it is a YA novel, and everything goes by so quickly; though she makes it clear she could write a thoroughly fleshed-out adult novel were that her purpose, she hews to the YA paradigm skillfully and does not try the patience of her intended audience.

Patricia Wrede is the most industrious of the Minneapolis-area fantasy writers, with several novels to her credit; *Snow White and Rose Red* is her contribution to Terri Windling's ongoing Fairy Tale Series. It is based on a lesser-known Grimm tale (not the seven-dwarf one) about a widow and her two daughters (the title characters) and the changeling-bear they befriend. Wrede sets it in Elizabethan England, and replaces the tale's irascible dwarf with a pair of historical characters, the physician and occultist Dr. Dee and his nefarious collaborator Ned Kelly. The magic focuses on herbal lore and appropriate ritual: the widow uses her little magic power discreetly, since her suspicious neighbors will persecute any suspected of witchcraft. Her daughters, eager to learn magic themselves, are comfortable with their life on the very marches of Faerie. The tension of the plot opposes the interminable squabbles of the Faerie Court with the pursuit of knowledge and love by Dee and cohort, who are heedless of the consequences of said pursuit. It's a deft piece of novelistic craft, worked around a straightforward archetypal core.

Her prose, at first look flat and uninviting, proves over the long haul to be solidly competent: informative and precise, though perhaps

a bit overdone. The dialogue is highly-flavored emulation-Elizabethan, contrasting oddly with the rather Poughkeepsian contemporaneity of the narrative. The transitions between narrative and dialogue (always a difficult bit of technique to negotiate) are rather rough, belaboring the unspoken gestures and vocal inflections of conversation. But the writing is effective enough to make the book a solid entertainment.

Sorcery and Castles is one of those serendipitous works that occasionally happens without foreplanning; it resulted from Wrede and Caroline Stevermer (another Minneapolis writer) playing *The Letter Game*, where each took a character and wrote to the other's character without giving away what was going to happen next. What resulted was an epistolary Regency romance—with magic. Though it sounds like a peculiar conceit, it works like a charm, because it never seems forced. With one character in the country, one in the city, each with her attendant suitors and magical adversaries, the plot ticks along like clockwork. The magic is not only practical and firmly grounded, it is more than a little scary. Despite two authors at first working independently, the dovetailing and the resolution of the situation plays fair and is satisfying. It's light fare in the Georgeette Heyer mold, and a particular delight for fantasy and Regency readers alike.

Stevermer's first solo fantasy, *The Serpent's Egg*, is an uncommon piece of work, despite its common materials: we have a small kingdom of roughly 16th century cast, whose queen holds court and goes on progress among her subjects; the evil duke her chief counselor, plotting to take the throne himself; the noble knight leading the Queen's army, who is poisoned by a conspirator; the heir to the throne who writes bad poetry; the magic jewel that tells the future and clouds minds; and a supporting cast of dozens.

At the center of the book is Margaret Yewesley, lady-in-waiting to the queen, betrothed to the murdered knight, who becomes the nerve-center of the counter-conspiracy. She is thus first described:

She was a calm person, tidy in a quietly colored gown . . . richly made . . . yet simple enough in design to suggest severity.

It is in a real sense her story, for the book she inhabits is in all these ways like her.

The most uncommon quality of the book is its modesty. It tells its manystranded tale straightforwardly, without fuss; its characters are memorably presented; and its prose is (to the embroidered brocade or spandex glitter of other novels) like finepun linen. It has a grace and

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elegance that on occasion flows into a plainspoken poetry that takes one's breath away.

Also welcome for its rarity is wit: all the characters, in both their thoughts (this is a third-person limited novel) and their dialogue, take a wry view of life; as in Jane Austen, Stevermer's reader is carried along amusingly through what is essentially a serious story.

"A sonnet?" she asked. "I suppose that's an improvement. In your hands hexameters are a deadly weapon" (p. 3).

The finest moments in the book are two dream sequences which manage the sterling feat of being at once numinous and humorous; here the book glows like its eponymous gem.

Imprisonment of many kinds is a significant theme of the narrative, and this also becomes self-referential, for this slim volume feels quite constricted: the characters seem to jostle one another for elbow room to develop themselves; scenes it would have been satisfying to witness happen during line-breaks; and the magical gem of the title does not influence the proceedings as much as one expects. The novel is too "modest and severe" to allow its "richly made" material full scope.

But brevity apart, *The Serpent's Egg* is the very model of what the fantasy novel can, and ought to, achieve; with the sad state of the realm at present, however, works of this quality are all too rare. Amid a welter of fantasies that blare boldly like brass or twitter busily like woodwinds, it is no wonder that this viol-consort of a book has gotten lost; I would have missed it myself but for happenstance.

The common thread linking these seemingly disparate books is that they suggest a literary movement which we might term "fantasy of manners." The writers thereof belong to a generation for whom the career of the Beatles, and the musical flowering thereby engendered (including the English folk-rock bands like Fairport Convention who introduced so many to traditional ballads), roughly endpointed their adolescence; as the first TV generation, they also grew up with shows such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Star Trek*, and *The Avengers*, as well as swashbuckling costume dramas like *Robin Hood*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and *The Three Musketeers*.

Even in a media-drenched culture, however, this is a generation of readers: fairy tales (Grimm, Andersen, Andrew Lang) made an early and lasting impression; children's literature (Narnia, Oz, etc.) was relaxed long after the writers' own childhoods. The costume dramas, so close to fantasy in feel, led to reading the books filmed, as well as similar work like Georgette Heyer's witty Regency romances (as well as her more distinguished predecessors Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë) and historical fiction, crucially the magisterial Lyndon Chronicles of Dorothy Dunnett. The paperback editions of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* came at an impressionable age, followed shortly by the Ballantine Adult Fantasy reprints of Tolkien's predecessors (William Morris's *The Well at the World's End* et al., Dunsany's short fiction, Edision's *The Worm Ouroboros* and Zarnianian trilogy, etc.) as well as estimable emulators such as Le Guin's Earthsea books, Joy Chant's *Red Moon and Black Mountain*, and Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*; it was, for young people encountering this cornucopia of paperbacks, a golden age of fantasy.

Throwing all these influences, among which traditional fantasy is important but some what secondary, into the melting pot has produced a clearly-recognizable sensibility quite distinct from other current fantasy attitudes—Howardian sword & sorcery, dark fantasy, post-Tolkien trilization, urban fantasy, magic realism, etc. It arose spontaneously in several areas of the country, and exists in three main branches: the Northeast (Jane Yolen, Ellen Kushner, Terri Windling as well as Sherman), in the Midwest (John M. Ford, the Scribbles—Emma Bull and Stephen Brust among them—as well as Wrede and Stevermer), and on the West Coast (the Mythopoeic Society, founded as a Tolkien-Lewis-Williams group but gradually flinging out its focus to other fantasy; Sherwood Smith is among the few published writers this less-developed group has produced). Members of this overall group have gathered socially at World Fantasy Con, and founded the 4th Street Fantasy Convention held annually in Minneapolis as a forum to discuss the issues that most concern them, inviting their peers and mentors as guest speakers.


What is it exactly that characterizes this multifaceted sensibility?

Primary, I think, is the importance of childhood; not only that of the individual, but of literature as well. Children speak from the heart, simply and passionately; they say what is true, even when adults, or society, do not wish to hear it—this is the lesson of "The Emperor's New Clothes." Earlier forms of literature—folktales and ballads—have the same characteristic: they are straightforward and pithy, and express archetypal truths. But children's passions are unrestrained, and in order for people to interact without hurting one another—verbally or physically—children learn from early childhood to rein their passions and learn rules—manners—which define the environment—society—which they live in.

Samuel R. Delany points out that somewhere in W. H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* is the notion that "human beings are creatures who can never become anything without pretending to be it first." This school of writers recognizes this, and sees adulthood, sophisticated behavior, as a grownup form of the childhood game of "let's pretend." For them, society—any society—is not fixed, but capable of change (the vision of our own society's potential change in the late sixties is relevant here); posit a different set of rules, and you have a different society, which difference will cast light upon our own (which is both the lure of fantasy—and historical fiction—as well as the chief function of science fiction). And within any one society, the rules are not rigid or stratified, but fluid, malleable, negotiable: the only difference between children and adults, between peasant and nobility, between men and women, is manners, society's rules. Dress Cinderella, or Liza Doolittle, in a ball gown, and a princess is revealed. Let Pippi Longstocking, or Rosalind in *As You Like It*, don male garb, and no one will notice her true gender. School Rudolf Rassendyll in the proper behavior, and he is the King.

With adulthood comes the recognition that "let's pretend" is not merely a childish game, to be discarded for the next game, but serious business: for one *does* become what one pretends to be. And though, to function in society, we must, on one level, be superficial, we must be careful to make sure the persona we create is in tune with what we are in our hearts. Pretend that you have power over others' lives, and you will become a bully (or a politician); act flirtatious, pretend that no one is good enough for you, and you may be sure no one will be; cling to childish ways, and you will remain a child. Power and passion are seductive, but unreliable and dangerous; what endures, in the end, is simple human decency, recognition of one another's true qualities, and the companionship and loyalty of true friendship: between Napoleon and Ilya or Steed and Mrs. Peel; between king and courtier (Sherman); between friends both new and old (Smith); between mother and daughters or between sisters (Wrede); between betrothed as well as knight and squire, even after death (Stevermer). Heroism lies, for these writers, not in mighty deeds of violence, but in the moral decision to act according to one's own nature and affinities.

In the end, "let's pretend" operates on a purely literary level as well: "what if this bare-bones traditional ballad (*Through a Brazen Mirror*) or this sparsely told fairy tale (*Snow White and Rose Red*) or this Basil Rathbone swashbuckler (*The Serpent's Egg*) were really modern novels, grown-up literature, with all the richness, complexity, and moral dilemmas of the world we live in? What if the childishness fantasy is so often guilty of aspired to true adulthood?"

Let's pretend: that these writers, now coming to maturity, will become what fantasy means in the years to come. And that the manner of fantasy will thereby be transformed. 

The writer is grateful to Maud and Morven for the hint.

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The New York Review of Science Fiction 9

Summer of Night by Dan Simmons

New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1991; \$22.95 hc; 560 pages

reviewed by David Repton Herter

Summer of Night finds its author in Ray Bradbury's pumpkin patch, a field of fantasy that I find hard to resist.

Others have been here before. Tom Reamy, Peter Straub, and Robert Charles Wilson come to mind, but none have approached more directly than Simmons. He interprets Bradbury without a wink, as if the pumpkin patch were his, and it's this boldness that initially wins the reader over.

In the small town of Elm Haven, school lets out for the summer of 1960. For the five boys who call themselves the Bike Patrol, vacation will turn from youthful joy into a horrifying rite of passage. Some will not make it; some will emerge older, and wiser, as they confront the history of the school's Borgia Bell and try to stop the spread of evil in their town.

Liston:

... this morning there were the sound of birds, the rich, warm air of summer coming through screens, the sound of a lawnmower down the street as some early-rising retired person began the daily yard chores, and—already visible through the curtains—the rich, warm benediction of sunlight falling across Dale's and Lawrence's bed as if the barrier of the gray school year had been raised and color had been allowed to return to the world (p. 25).

And not a dark carnival in sight. To Bradbury's familiar riffs (close to parody in the quote above), Simmons adds a shot of Stephen King's slick storytelling and a bucket of chum from the latest Clive Barker novel.

In previous works, notably "Metastasis" and *Garrison Comfort*, Simmons proved himself adept at graphic horror. Here, those influences (call them Splatterpunk) seem unnecessary, either a substitute for authentic *fear* or a calculated marketing choice, and it undermines the book by sacrificing insight for irrelevant, excessive violence. We're left with a novel that begins with a wonderful sense of place, a clear-eyed view of boyhood, only to descend into a routine horror plot, and finally plummet into a gore fest.

We can take *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *Dandelion Wine* as the inspiration, appended with Simmons's own autobiographical details. He gives us Elm Haven in place of Green Town. Both will be found in Illinois, but while Bradbury's served as metaphor, Simmons strives to make his realistic. Here lies the book's strength: a beautifully detailed town, an intriguing local history, and a cast of characters who are, unlike Jim Nightshade and Mr. Dark, anything but symbolic.

Simmons succeeds admirably in this first third of the novel, conjuring up the activities of summer (so glorious in their unimportance) with the same splendid, deliberate pace that the members of the Bike Patrol give to their days. Several scenes in particular resonate with clarity of insight. Scandouts include a game of Rock War played in the woods behind the town, ending with a beatific swim; and a gathering at the Cave, the patrol's secret hideout, that recreates the magical self-importance of boyhood (Simmons's marvelous short story "Shave and a Haircut, Two Bites" also dealt with this, and its central image of the barber pole is echoed here).

We learn about Elm Haven from bike-level as the Patrol rides through its streets—and what wonderful streets they are: Broad Avenue, a "tunnel of elms" leading to the driveway of the dilapidated, and



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perhaps haunted, Ashley mansion; School Street, brooded over by Old Central; and the gravel road that rolls into the land of Sleepy Hollow.

The physical layout of the town, presented in such unhumored yet comprehensive detail, anchors us for the horror to come; and violence that was poetic in Bradbury promises to take its toll in gruesome and unpredictable ways. Tension, therefore, replaces nostalgia, and leads us to expect a story that goes beyond Bradbury.

At the end of the first third, one of the boys thinks that "this was the way summer should be. This is the way it was going to be." Simmons ends the wish with a single line: "Dale had never been so wrong."

And the troubles begin, both for the boys and for the author.

Simmons must be commended for trying to avoid predictability. Anyone who has read *Song of Kali* will remember how the plot was actively engaged in foiling the reader's expectations. Though not so serpentine, *Summer of Night* contains several unexpected turns, including the death of a Bike Patrol member; and though death isn't always final in horror novels, Simmons wisely makes it so.

Unfortunately this robs us of the most intriguing character in the book, an intellectual who had been investigating the town's history. Without him, we lose our connection to the past, and the Bike Patrol wanders into more mundane territory.

Perhaps sensing this, Simmons begins to structure the chapters with mechanical similarity: each begins with a hook, a wild statement that pulls us into the segment; and each ends with a hook to toss us into the next (he used the same technique, barely under control, in *The Fall of Hyperion*). Once apparent, the structure generates more frustration than excitement.

He also elevates violence to explicit heights, overloading scenes with the unambiguous, disturbed imagery of Splatterpunk. We get a corpse with "an entire ring of short, white teeth surrounding the inside of the round, lipless ring of a mouth," that becomes "a sort of flesh-rimmed funnel" and drops "a brown and writhing mass maggots" (pp. 340-341); only to later "explode sideways with chunks of pasty white flesh bouncing off the house and pattering on the linden leaves" (p. 481). And we get dialogue like "You surrender now, you motherfucking little worm, or we shall rip your fucking heart from your chest . . . we shall chew your balls off and serve them to our minions" (p. 479).

We surrender the quiet horror of the first third to maggots, lampry worms, corpses, slime, black blood. The creepy history of the

Borgia Bell is forgotten and the whole affair escalates toward a finale that recalls the imagery of the movie *Alien*, as the Patrol infiltrates the classrooms of Old Central:

The organic-looking stuff dripped from railings and banisters, hung in great clumpy strands from portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, dribbled in even thicker webs from the hooks in the cloakrooms, dangled from the doorknobs and transoms, hung from the corners of the boarded windows like huge, irregular picture frames made of pulsing flesh, and rose toward the mezzanine and dark stairs in a great cheesy mass of strands and squalors. (p. 516)

Disgusting, perhaps, in an EC Comics sort of way, but not horrifying. Such excess cripples the book, failing to illustrate Simmons's (and Bradbury's) themes of lost innocence, and the horror that lies beneath the surface of bucolic America. The book doesn't entirely recover.

To be fair, Simmons succeeds more than Stephen King's forays into the pumpkin patch. Although *Summer of Night* is more than 500 pages long, it never feels as overblown as *It*. Unlike King, Simmons never seems to indulge himself at the reader's expense; all the scenes count toward the final effect, and he creates real kids instead of characterizing them by quirks (recall Bill "the stutterer" Denbrough and Rich "the comedian" Tozier, kids defined by their imposed afflictions).

Some have done better. In *Blind Voices*, Tom Reamy offered the post-modern angle, rebuilding the Bradbury mythos with an incisive, shocking, yet sensitive and sentimental eye. Peter Straub's *Shadowland* took the familiar riffs and worked them invisibly into his own style, while in *A Hidden Place* and the Book of the Beast trilogy, Robert Charles Wilson and Robert Stallman created lovely Depression-era fantasies that echoed both Bradbury and Sturgeon.

So we can't blame the patch. Simmons began with a clear eye and a perfect pumpkin, and we can only fault the hand that guided the knife, during the carving.

David Repton Horner lives in Seattle.

Minotaur Maze by Robert Sheckley

Eugene, OR: Axlotl Press, 1990; [no price listed]; 110 pages

reviewed by John J. Ordover

In recent years Robert Sheckley, once ranked among the sharpest and most individual of writers, has been sunk in a swamp composed of mediocre commercial novels set in the world of his "Seventh Victim," and generally uninspired short stories in shared world collections such as *The Further Adventures of Batman and Isaac's Universe* (see NTRSF #23). While possessed of a certain spark, they fail to live up to his earlier work. Many readers had despaired of him ever finding his way out of the pest, but with *Minotaur Maze*, Sheckley recaptures his former glory and adds a capstone to his most personal work.

Those stories most representative of Sheckley feature an everyman hero, disaffected and disaffected, stuck in a rut he lacks the motivational energy to climb out of, who is forced to action by events and/or beings beyond his control, events that amount to a lament that the real universe isn't more like this—that it isn't far more exciting, unpredictable, and entertaining than it is—that it isn't a wonderfully random place in which mountains move against the sky and anything can become anything else.

Whether it is a god playing cosmic crosswords ("What is Life?"), a disembodied voice providing new directions for living ("Cordle to Onion to Carrot"), an emissary from a previously unknown galactic federation who appears in your living room (*Dimension of Miracles*), what's important in Sheckley's most personal stories is that, as much as it may look like our own initially, the fictive universe is far less rigid and far more interesting than the actual.

Minotaur Maze is the latest of these stories. Abandoning his usual

approach of simply adding strange discontinuities to the universe-as-it-is, Sheckley builds his own Universe for the book, constructing a space/time, future/past, all-encompassing maze that is described as more complex than the Universe in which it resides: a theoretical impossibility; the achievement is so impressive that Allen Observers come to wonder at it. When Sheckley tells us the Maze includes both the author and the audience come to watch the goings on in the Maze, he neatly deconstructs his own worldview and lays the pieces out on display in front of us, albeit in slightly new guises.

Rather than elevating the everyman, he gives us Theseus, the mythological hero, then reduces him to a human level—and does the same to the Minotaur as well. Here neither Theseus nor his Minotaur prey are satisfied with their situation: Theseus would rather just shuck up with Phaedra, a waitress he met in a bar sometime after, or before (or both), leaving Ariadne behind on the island of Naxos, then spend his time hunting monsters. The Minotaur has come to realize that he was better off in his old maze of ordinary stone and is deadly tired of being hunted. To add to his dissatisfaction, he has come to the conclusion that he is, at heart, a unicorn, and has made arrangements to visit Aesculapian to have one of his horns removed as a symbolic gesture. Yet he never quite gets around to doing it. Neither he nor Theseus have their hearts in the chase any more—they've been at it too long, yet they both lack the gumption to make a real change in their circumstances.

The maze in which they find themselves is superficially chaotic, odd, insane, looping back on itself, a place where you find yourself dealing with problems before, during, and after their causes. But

repeating patterns eventually become obvious to the players (similar to the maze in Sheekley's "Redfern's Labyrinth") and therefore become a bore, like a movie seen too many times. Designed and built by Dedalus, and initially populated by the transplanted inhabitants of the city of Paris (whom no one really misses), it is a masterpiece of construction. Yet the equations that run the maze show that if all factors were known, everything that happened in the maze would be exactly predictable. Even though it is not possible to know all these factors, the fact his maze is not provably unpredictable is extremely upsetting to Dedalus, whose own quest is therefore for a creative Universe like Sheekley's. But Sheekley is still doing Dedalus one better. Here he attacks his own fictional Universe for being at heart as static and lacking in self-will as the real Universe.

Sheekley's fiction reflects a desperate desire for things and objects to constantly re-create themselves. The two clearest examples of this are in "The Petrified World," in which a man who lives in a world of constant flux has visions of our world, in which the bank on the corner will always be a bank, unless someone comes and makes it into something else, and is of course horrified at this unnatural and stultifying stability, and the ending of *Mindswap* in which living in The Twisted World—where anything and everything can happen—is the paradisaical reward the hero receives.

But *Minotaur Maze* is radically different from what Sheekley has done before. If his earlier work can be viewed as railing against the Universe and its constancy, *Minotaur Maze* is an acceptance, a sign that his battle is over, that even in an impossible Maze, more complex than the Universe itself, truly self-motivated (in the sense of shoes deciding from one moment to the next whether they will be wing-tips or loafers) creativity cannot be found. Interestingly, Sheekley demands of the Universe and the objects in it what his characters can never successfully demand of themselves: true change.

Sheekley also seems to be presenting an idea first proposed by Plato, that those who have absolute control over their surroundings—dictators, authors—are not the freest of men, but the worst prisoners, because they can do only that which they will. By his reasoning, books can therefore contain only that which the author wants to put in them, and the author, (especially the science fiction or fantasy author) is therefore not the most unfettered, but the most restricted.

This then is an entirely new level of complaint; despair that not only does the Universe contain no surprises, doing nothing for him that he does not do for himself, but also, from Sheekley's point of view, neither does his fiction. All his fictional worlds have been built by him and his own created world is therefore, to him, the most predictable of all.

Gregory Feeley The Evidence of Things Not Shown Family Romance in *The Book of the New Sun* (Part II)

Who is the protagonist of *There are Doors*? It has been suggested—I think without much perception—that he is named Adam Green. But we are told so only by one of the novel's characters, a heartless liar who earlier denies to the protagonist what he knows to be true on the chance that she might make him doubt his sanity. The protagonist calls himself Mr. Green, but as a former mental patient his sanity is legitimately in doubt. The narrative voice calls him by no name at all, not even when its insistence on an impersonal pronoun risks confusion with other characters.

A great deal of evidence can be adduced, though much at first seems contradictory. When the protagonist uses the word "viridian" in describing his vanished lover, the woman he queries asks, "Viridian, Mr. . . ." and the protagonist replies, "Green—viridian's a bluish green." Thereafter the woman addresses him as Mr. Green, which however the protagonist recognizes as his name. He is of course perhaps suggestive, but we eventually notice that his employers also call him Mr. Green.

Sometimes the protagonist tells people his name, although we never told what that is; and sometimes he says his name is Green, although we cannot be sure that in doing so he is telling his name. He does not object when his lover—a goddess after whom he abjectly

On a scene-by-scene basis the book is quite funny, although there is a good helping of pain along with the humor. Consider the message Anadine leaves for Theseus after she begins to realize he won't be coming back to Naxos:

"Will you give him a message? [she said] Tell him it's morning in Naxos and it rains all the time. Tell him he has no right to do this but don't tell him that he'll just get angry. . . tell him there's one version of the legend in which Theseus and Ariadne settled down in Naxos and lived there the rest of their lives. Tell him that that's the one we decided was true in case he's forgotten" (p. 33).

and this description of the Minotaur:

... the Minotaur has several disguises which have proven effective in the past. One of his ruses is to dress himself up as a Renault police van, painted dark blue, with policemen appliqued on the windows. Deep in his throat the Minotaur makes the sound of a motor ticking over, its tires whispering of atrocious pain and meaningless retribution. People tend to avoid him when he wears his van disguise, even those who see through it move away and mind their own business, because the police have been known to disguise their vans as Minotaurs disguised as vans; there is no end to their twisted subtlety . . . (p. 37).

The book is filled with the sadness of acceptance. With *Minotaur Maze* Sheekley shows that he is past being angry that the Universe is not as he would have had it, and is now grieving for what he's lost, and while something has indeed been lost—the ideal of the self-willed Universe—there has been a net gain, for both the reader and for Sheekley: with *Minotaur Maze*, Sheekley has extricated himself from the commercial, self-derivative quagmire he had sunk into.

While *Minotaur Maze* contains many familiar Sheekleyan ingredients—for instance a Hunter (Theseus) and a Victim (The Minotaur)—it is not merely the last drops wrung out of an old idea, but is in fact a new outlook and perhaps a new Sheekley paradigm, which, if lacking in youthful anger, has achieved a certain maturity and perspective, and seems almost to be a commentary on his early work. In any case, as someone who has in recent years bought far too many shared world collections for no reason other than Sheekley's name on the cover, I feel my faith has been at long last rewarded.

— introduces him as Adam K. Green, but then he wouldn't. He is "astounded" to learn that a past lover of the goddess was named Billy, and soon afterward, in his one moment of self-assertion with the woman, accuses her of being attracted to men with that name.

Sorting the data suggests something like this: the man's name, on one level at least, is William Green. The goddess introduced him as Adam K. for reasons of her own, and Wolfe includes the misdirection about viridian as a joke (whose aggressive component is directed, it should however be noted, against the reader—there is no reticent first-person narrator at whose door such dodges can be laid). But the narrative voice never identifies anyone as William Green; it is resolute in referring to the protagonist merely as "he". The goddess, we know, once called herself Leucothea—she refuses, yes, to give her real name—but she admits she once loved Attis, which makes her Cybele. The suggestion, if I am reading it right, is that "he" is the eternal lover of she who might be called The White Goddess (in Greek: Leucothea) or the Great Mother of The Gods (to the Greeks: Cybele). In a sense he may be Attis (who figures in *Soldier of the Mist*), but if you want to give him a name from one of Wolfe's other books, you might as well call him the Green Man.

Names matter, so are hidden. The protagonist of *Soldier of the Mist*

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Ramsey Campbell:

First Light by Peter Ackroyd (Hamish Hamilton, 1989; Grove Weidenfeld, 1989). A masterpiece of English supernatural fiction, of the kind which suggests visions larger than the narrative. I confess to finding uncanny similarities in it—Floey and Joey Hanover seem to have stayed out of two of my own books and got married—but that's the least of its eerie pleasures.

Heathens by Jack Womack (Unwin Hyman, 1990; Tor 1990). A witty, breathless and unconvincingly vivid satire set in a future which feels all too imminent, by a writer whose prose remakes the way you read.

The Old Devil by Kingsley Amis (Hutchinson, 1986). I was returning from London in a state of hideous depression after a British publisher had brought out the first edition of my new novel as a library hardcover only, and found that I'd missed my flight to Liverpool and had to wait at the airport for three hours. On impulse I bought the Amis. No other book has ever cheered me up so much or brought me so many stares for laughing in a public place. Great comic writing—inimitable, I should say.

The Hole in the Wall by Arthur Morrison (presently out of print but not hard to find). At the end of *Treasure Island* Jim Hawkins writes of suffering bad dreams about his adventures, and this 1902 novel could almost be one of them. It resembles a nightmare version of the Stevenson with a real sense of horror.

Sleepwalker by Michael Cadnum (St. Martin's Press, 1991). Now that I've to editing *Two New Horror* I've been doing swears of just how much sub-literary tripe is spilling out of the horror corpus. A writer such as Cadnum is a real find—a

novelist with a poet's eye for realism and ear for language. When this compact Gothic confronts the supernatural it achieves a quality of awesome terror worthy of the classics of the field.

The Ascent of Rum Doodle by W. E. Bowman (Max Parrish, 1956). For my taste this is funnier than *Three Men in a Boat*, though it is far less famous. Beware *The Cruise of the Talking Fish*, Bowman's embarrassing attempt to repeat his success.

Race Against Time by David Bolton (Methuen, 1990). Why did I read a history of the British Inland Waterways Association? Because interwoven with this theme is the most revealing biography of Robert Aickman I've read. *The River Runs Uphill*, the second volume of Robert's autobiography, was published in Britain a few years ago, but it was gone again before almost anyone noticed.

Why Come to Slains by Malcolm Bradbury (Secker & Warburg, 1986). A parody of an Eastern European guidebook, the sort of idea (like Ballard's tale in the form of an index) that makes me jealous. One to read aloud to your friends.

Cold in July by Joe R. Lansdale (Bantam, 1989). Lansdale's *Nightcrawlers* is the last novel I found genuinely frightening, and his *Drive-in* has all the qualities of a nightmare, but I think this is his finest that I've read—a superb crime novel, disturbing in various ways.

Seeing the Cherry by Jeanette Winterson (Bloomsbury, 1989). A delicious fantasy by a truly original writer. Its scope is as large as its length is terse. Hilarious, moving, provocative. A delight.

is called Latro, but we learn this is not his real name on the text's first page, and what his real name is on the last. It is the earliest hidden name in Wolfe's canon. Those of the protagonists of *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*—the boy in the *Madison du Chien* and the prisoner in Cell 143—are harder, but accede to scrutiny.

Such obsessive encryption of names is not peculiar to Wolfe's mature method. One of his earliest stories is "House of Ancestors," which was published in 1968. Wolfe's bibliography identifies it as his ninth sale and seventh publication, but in order of composition it may well come earlier. It is not a good story,¹ but strikingly anticipates several of Wolfe's abiding themes. In addition to featuring a great house that seems somehow coextensive with its occupant (here a tower for a future World's Fair created in the shape of a human DNA molecule and sensitive to the identities of those who enter), we have a protagonist whose surname, though it comes up in the story, is never mentioned, and who meets a mysterious young woman whom he finds unexpectedly attractive. She proves to be his mother, as she appeared at the time of his conception.

Names matter, and are hidden. I have not determined the names—and so the truest identities—of these figures, nor that of Hether, whose real name is "a much older one, that hardly anyone has heard of now," nor that of the bleeding woman Severian mysteriously recalls seeing at

the base of the Matarachin Tower. But it no longer seems labored to think them part of the text, and important once teased out. Wolfe may in time have thought, and very reasonably, that he had perhaps encypted these data too deeply for readers to find, or even think to seek. The overhints of the "Books" essay, so uncharacteristic of Wolfe, suggest this.

Gender matters, and seems hidden. The possibility that the Autarch is "a woman dressed as a man" is mentioned early, although it is buried among other, mostly incredible conjectures; and the androgyny of his features, so conspicuous that it can be discerned on the bas-relief of a coin, is not something that would be produced by gelding in adulthood. When Valeria says she is all the sisters they breed and all the sons, she seems to be echoing Viola's reply in *Twelfth Night*: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, And all the brothers too." Viola is a woman impersonating a man, which, as Agia explains, is easy to do. Valeria is not that, but the resonance of her remark suggests the ambiguity of gender. It is appropriate in a world in which Agia's is only the crudest means of reversing gender: Severian who has subsumed Thecla is in many ways a woman, and is sometimes mistaken for one.

Such allusions are frequent in the tetralogy. A profoundly literary work, it resounds with echoes, which can sometimes, like radar, reveal hidden structures. The opening chapter's off-remarked evocation of *Great Expectations* suggests to us early that Severian is destined for great things, and his later tea in the decaying quarters of Valeria's ancestral home should cue us that it is she who shall prove the love of his life. Other allusions to Dickens run less deep: Jonas's characteristic idioms are identical to Sam Weller's in *Pickwick*, but this seems more homage than tip-off; we already know that he is Severian's faithful companion.

Other verbal echoes seem inadvertent, the scraps of phrases and image that cling in the memory of any writer. When Wolfe writes of the Urth's wise men gathering "in solemn conclave," he is repeating a felicitous phrase from Harlan Ellison's "Tuckrocker," while the image

¹Nor has it come to us in a good text. Its magazine appearance (*If*, June 1968) has significant misprints—one character refers familiarly to his sister as "Sir"—and bears all the stigma of Galaxy Publishing Corp.'s design policies, such as the division of all "novelers" into numbered chapters, and frequent breaks in the text for graphic purposes. The story itself was never anthologized, nor reprinted until last year when it was collected in *Endangered Species*, which apparently used the typesets as setting copy and replicated all the errors.

of Typhon nursing his erection as he speaks is from Blish's *Black Easter*. These pinpoint correspondences are too small to matter, just as the tetralogy's affinity with *The Dying Earth* is wide but shallow—though we may remember that Blish's figure was an infernal one when we recall the marked similarities between Typhon's offer of the world to Severian and Jesus' Temptation in the Wilderness.

Severian is, in fact, repeatedly likened to Jesus: in his reviving Dorcas, in her pointed comment to him ("To me you're Life, and you're a young man named Severian, and if you wanted to put on different clothes and become a carpenter or a fisherman, no one could stop you"), in the fact—again supplied in an essay by Wolfe—that the only object Jesus is shown creating was a whip; in the scene following his elevation to journeyman, when he seems to dream (but the aquasator resembling Malrubius appears, so it is not a dream) that the ruined chapel is restored, with the body and blood of Christ upon its altar as Severian ascends through the air.

The ruined chapel inevitably evokes the Chapel Perilous of the Grail Legends, which have their origin in the nature rituals intended to restore to life a deity associated with fertility and the growth of vegetation. Long before the legend passed into the hands of medieval Romance, it was, as Weston described in *From Ritual to Romance*, a ritual whose "very heart and center" was the figure of the maimed Fisher King. This ritual can be traced, Weston argues, all the way back in the cult of Attis, but never mind. It is enough to note that these rites involve a deity who is dead and must be restored to life through the enactments of a sword dance. *Matashinas* is a Spanish name for this dance; it is entirely appropriate that the New Sun be raised by the sword dances of the Matashin Tower.

The images of bees and honey that recur throughout the text (the first iteration of a rote formula in praise of the autarch states that his every deed is sweeter than honey, and we eventually are told that the hives of the House Absolute are sacred), prove also amenable to allusive gloss. In European folktales bees were created in order to provide wax for church candles, or sprang from the tears shed by Christ on the Cross. More significantly, their honey is associated with Helios, the Greek sun whose myth was conflated in later classical times with that of Apollo, whose song of victory is the Paean.

So the reader can trace the Christian, pagan, and Apollonian motifs of the *Book*, all of which elude about the image of the Conciliator as a divine restorer of light and fertility. The only other figure with whom Severian (whose name carries numerous Christian connotations) is linked is the author himself, as the scene in which Little Severian looks at the constellations and likens the Big Wolf and the Little Wolf to the two Severians makes abundantly clear. Few writers would have the effrontery to identify themselves—even through scrims of metonymy—with the Messiah, but the use of the wolf as an image associating protagonist with author is one we have seen before. Like the Gene or Jean Wolfe of *Cerberus*, or the figures in stories such as "The Hero As Werewolf" and "Four Wolves," Severian glances up an unexpected moment to meet the reader's gaze with lupine eyes and say in a familiar voice, "*L'histoire, c'est moi.*"

It is not, of course, an identification to be made too literally, not least since Severian is a profoundly less appealing character than he seems to present himself. For all that credulous critics have written of *The Book of New Sun* as a "coming of age" or "spiritual quest," the truth is that Severian changes very little after leaving the Matashin Tower, and carefully records opinions of himself that his own account does not sustain. The Autarch may think of him simply as a man with a strong interest in women, but the text shows us one whose sexual impulse is deeply sadistic: who is aroused by the thought of violating the client la, who consistently assaults his sex partners—Jolenta, Dania, Cyriaca, the khalbit in the House Azure, even ("I knew too that I was incapable of sparing her") Dorcas; the only seeming exceptions, Thecla and Pia, perhaps pre-empt this urge because they come before him already bound and imprisoned. Severian says, many times, that the secret of his guild is that they never judge but only implement; yet he is forever seeking to vent his wrath upon the uncondemned, such as the wagoner at the Piteous Gate whose whip strikes Dorcas during a disturbance, prompting Severian to attempt an impromptu castration. He certainly judges the wretched Casdee, as a consequence of which the surviving members of that family are wiped out; significantly, Severian declines to

Michael Swanwick Writing in My Sleep (Third in a Series)

When you write in your sleep, you have no control over length. The unconscious neither knows nor cares about cost-benefit ratios. It will gladly spend half the night writing and rewriting a single paragraph until it gleams like an apple in the sun.

Here are three short dreams:

"Ether"

If you slide a page from a comic book into a shallow pan of ether, it does not as you would expect fade. Instead the colors intensify, growing more garish, and the outlines loosen, floated marginally above the page by the ether, and are exaggerated. A small nose disappears completely. A large nose swells. Loose clothing engulfs the character in tentlike folds. Muscles bulge.

I spent many a happy afternoon in my youth free-basing Wonder Woman.

"A Bicentennial Minute"

Twenty-five, perhaps as many as thirty years ago, our primitive, ape-like ancestors could not speak, but instead communicated by hitting each other with Rocks. Some hardy individuals were able to build vocabularies of up to forty words before falling over and bleeding excessively. And yet, utilizing this primitive means of data transfer, they harnessed the mastodon, and built the world's first steam-driven pyramids.

This has been a Bicentennial minute.

"Stage Direction"

Two people seated in overstuffed chairs of an indeterminate muddy color, near-fading, in three-quarter profile, their hair afe, speak the following lines: Quickly.

—in homage to Sam Beckett

interfere with her attackers until it appears that she is going to be raped.

"You have understood me better than I wanted," Jonas acknowledges at one point, and any author who creates a body of work of significant depth of feeling will inevitably disclose consistent contours of sensibility. As readers we are taught early not to confuse author with creation, just as we are told to write only in complete sentences; later, we gain a sense of when such maxims may be qualified. Severian is not his creator, but the numerous, fool-killing, sign-charged universe he occupies represents, at the least, a model of the world that the author considers reasonable, hence a model of the author's reason.

The particulars of such a model are, of course, no indication of artistic merit, although readers will notice if its topography exerts a distorting force on the imaginative world it underlies. Dorcas, although she comes in for some slight rough handling, is better treated than the more worldly women Severian encounters, and the reader who wonders whether this is due to Dorcas' relative otherworldliness (she is only a teenager, physically slight, and is recently back from the dead) will notice that Wolfe's subsequent novels evince clear signs of disgust toward women neither young nor otherworldly (*Soldier of the Mist* contains an explicit if unconvincing denial of this). His two most recent fictions, "The Haunted Boardinghouse" and *Castles in the Air*, both exalt an idealized

womanhood while treating the corporeal, fallible women of common reality with striking contempt. One may similarly feel a distorting pull when one notices that the few characters of the tetralogy who seem to be truly evil—the secular monsters Typhon, Baldanders (an unremittingly sinister figure by the third volume), the vivisection physician with the Ascians—all prove to be pedestars.

In the four years following the tetralogy's completion Wolfe published several stories and one novel set in the universe of Urth, one of them (*Empires of Foliage and Flower*) in a deluxe edition only optimates can buy. The major work among these is of course *The Urth of the New Sun*, not a fifth volume of the sequence but a discrete sequel to it. When announced, the novel prompted considerable speculation as to whether it would elucidate the mysteries left unexplained in Severian's fourth volume. Wolfe of course gave no more comfort to such optimists than he previously had to hopeful interviewers, and *The Urth of the New Sun* proved to be a deft, thoroughly professional performance that walks Severian through his trial and return to Urth without answering a single question posed by the tetralogy's secretive nature. Several points that would become clear in *The Book* only after a second reading—such as the nature of Apu-Pundchau in his stone house—are assumed to be understood, and we learn that *The Book of the New Sun* does indeed contain the same stories that are dramatized in Dr. Talos's play, but nothing Severian has hidden from us is revealed. Only a single point is betrayed: Severian's unnamed predecessor is referred to as "the old Autarch" both during Severian's reign and at the end of Valeria's ten-year regency in his absence, although logic suggests that by that time any such phrase would be reserved for Severian himself. Wolfe's willingness to accept a measure of awkwardness to keep that name unmentioned is the only thing not shown that I have found.

One other story merits comment, although it is not set in the background of Urth. "A Solar Labyrinth" (1983), an extremely short story with a contemporary setting, was published just as *The Citadel of the Autarch* appeared. The image of the labyrinth figures oddly in the tetralogy: despite the detailed retelling of the tale of Thescus, the labyrinth appears only as a network of ilets and straits the hero sails in search of the monster. It is a natural formation, so has no Dedalus. The mind of the Autarch is later referred to as "a maze," and that it is.

"A Solar Labyrinth" posits a labyrinth composed of assorted *objets* arranged on the lawn of a private estate, which cast elongated and slowly moving shadows in the morning light. Wolfe's charming description is without incident and seemingly without bite, unless one notices that although Mr. Smith, the wealthy aficionado who has "designed and built [the] new maze," is referred to by the breathless narrator as "this new Dedalus," his status as owner as well as designer of the maze makes him Minos as well. And the pleasant descriptions of house guests trying their skill in the maze in the company of their host ("the guest leading the way") casts Mr. Smith in yet a third role.

The story concludes with the image of Mr. Smith and "a solitary child" together on the sunlit lawn, the clincher for readers who have guessed what is going on. When the story was collected in *Storrs from the Old House*, Wolfe commented in its Introduction: "I tried to keep the sinister element well in the background, and it seems I kept it so far back that few readers notice it at all; but I like it that way." Enough so to draw attention to the fact, anyway. Let his comment stand as reminder of the helpfulness and suspect motives of Wolfe's own commentaries, and the story as a short, formal nudge: every maze holds a monster; labyrinths serve the interests of their builder. ▶

Appendix

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE AUTARCH

He has blue eyes (IV, 192), and white hair (I, 87).

He wears "thick-soled shoes" (I, 87). Because he is short! Yes: He is "not a tall man" (IV, 254).

His voice is "not truly either a man's or a woman's it might almost have been a boy's" (IV, 186). Elsewhere his voice is likened to "a man's tenor or a woman's contralto" (I, 88).

He looks like a "woman of forty" (II, 181).

He is not as strong as he looks (IV, 186-87). He amplifies this: he is not even as strong as a small, middle-aged man would seem to be. No suggestion that this owes to poor health.

He ascended to the Autarchy the same way Severian did (IV, 245)—i.e., by violence! Severian also notes that "Our predecessor reached it by chance" (IV, 272). The Autarch notes that he knows from experience that the tiny knife he carries will split a skull (IV, 235).

He "carried a tray in the House Absolute" (IV, 248).

Some Autarch—not necessarily this one, but probably—remembers "When I was a boy in the kitchens of the House Absolute" (IV, 241).

He "became a criminal" (IV, 194). The context of this admission strongly suggests that he became a criminal *after* ascending to the Autarchy ("I am also a criminal . . . All of us are—all of us who must enforce the law . . . So I became a criminal"). He "blunder[ed] about for some time," then found his "true profession," presumably as pandarer.

Whether he had already stood trial for the New Sun is unclear. He may well have done so only some years after his ascension to the throne, as Severian does.

He holds many positions. This tells us that he is able to disappear for periods from his autarchical post.

Chronology of the Autarch

Born a commoner in the service to the House Absolute. Boyhood in the kitchens, later a butler or server.

Becomes Autarch by chance, and uses the same knife Severian did

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in splitting his predecessor's skull. This apparently happens before Severian's birth. At least some people in the House Absolute know him for a former servant, and hate him for it.

He is visited by an aquator in the guise of "Paeon, who trained me, who is honey-steward fifty years gone by." Purpose of this visit was presumably to apprise him, as the Malrubius aquator did Severian, of his chance to stand trial to bring the New Sun.

He becomes a criminal, at first unsuccessfully. Later he oversees the House Azure.

He serves as Autarch for the next twenty years. At some point he stands trial and loses his manhood.

Early on the night that Severian and Roche are to visit the House Azure, the aquator again comes to the Autarch. He tells the Autarch that Severian will be his successor, although not that this shall come within the year. When Severian is leaving, the Autarch smiles at him.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CATHERINE

She is "tall and slender," although not of exulted height; "dark of eye, raven of hair" (I, 106).

She has not changed in appearance since Severian's first memories (I, 106), so is at least fifteen years older than him.

She belonged to an order of monials, from whom she ran away. This order was probably not the aristocratic Pelicines. There is no evidence she was born into the order: religious orders are not guilds, and those we see are celibate.

Chronology of Catherine

Nothing known of early life.

She joins and later runs away from an order of monials.

She becomes involved with Owen, is gotten pregnant by him, and

is arrested.

Gives birth to Severian and nurses him in the Matschin Tower (II, 257).

Contrary to Severian's speculations (II, 257) she is not done to death, and later enters into an arrangement with the Guild.

Nothing known of next twenty years, save for annual appearance at Feast Day.

Implications of collating these chronologies

Explains why Autarch and Catherine are both involved in crime at the same time ("around the time you [Severian] were born"). Explains Autarch's hint that his early forays at crime were not successful; explains Autarch's statement that he has an agent in the Matschin Tower.

Explains the Autarch's evident lack of strength despite good health.

Chronologies are complementary: all that is known of Catherine's is her bout with crime and subsequent trouble; this is the blank spot in the Autarch's.

Requires that Autarch gave birth to Severian before standing trial and losing "manhood" (here meaning fertility). Severian's aquator told him he could not stand trial until he had completed business—"perhaps not for decades"—so there is no reason to assume the autarch must have stood trial early in his/her reign. ▴

This article will appear in a volume of essays on Gene Wolfe forthcoming from Seresima Press.

Gregory Feeley, author of *The Oxygen Barons*, lives in Hamden, Connecticut.

Machine Sex, and Other Stories by Candas Jane Dorsey

London: The Women's Press, 1990; £4.95 pb; 164 pages

reviewed by Gwyneth Jones

What is it about books on The Women's Press of list that makes them different, these days—so specially feminist that they would not be at home with any mainstream of publisher? Feminist, or at any rate feminine, Utopias can turn up anywhere—likewise strong female characters, gender role reversal, post-gendered society, post-feminist tomboy heroics. Nevertheless the list has developed a certain personality, and a role that doesn't seem about to wither away. It includes substantial writers—Joanna Russ, Lisa Tuttle. It also has a flair for treasure-seeking, presenting to the British public writers of rare, individual beauty who definitely would not reach us (more's the pity) via any ordinary megacartel's info/entertainment subsidiary: recently, the admirable Carol Emshwiler.

Candas Jane Dorsey's *Machine Sex* is a collection of just this kind. But though she's certainly an individualist, this writer doesn't stretch the bounds of what may be considered sf: she is in continual dialogue with science fiction as it is, the state of the popular art. Dorsey, apparently, is primarily a poet. She approaches each story with the same entirely literary and entrancing style. It is only by small admissions, as if reluctantly, that her *consciousness of the corpus* emerges. A tiny group of pioneers, generations ahead of the real colonists, are planting life on a new planet ("Johnny Appleseed in the New World"). The story is elusive, elliptical, with secret meanings close to the surface, very far from what it might have been in the hands of a genre grandee a generation ago—but *that's* just what she wants, *there ain't no justice*. "You'll Remember Mercury" hovers around a starship captain, returned from her experience of first contact, and dwells on the distance between souls, the impossibility of making contact here on earth. But the ship is a "real" starship, with Star Trek damage control dialogue and a standard late-eighties flt drive (the black hole hook model). "Columbus Hits the Shoreline Rage" is the lately-fashionable deconstruction game. In lively cut up it takes those colorful natives, so often awarded the consolation prize of fictional superpowers, and has them literally invade the space-ship—with a mean, downbeat ending.

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Characteristically, feminist sf turns the genre inside out. The metaphors become the surface. The adventure story, in which these coded messages about death, sex, change, the nature of power, were always hidden, is almost subsumed. Some of Dorsey's stories seem to comment on the pitfalls of this relationship as well as exemplifying it. The only inclusion with no discernable trace of sf context ("Time Is the School in Which We Learn . . .") is the meditation of a woman dying of cancer, but the collection as a whole shares its distanced tone: a calm, continually restated no to the adventurous yarns Dorsey has cannibalized. The unnamed woman narrator of "Black Dog" lives on in a world that has been abandoned, after the human race has taken off for the stars. The unnamed (political prisoner?) in the chilling "Sleeping in a Box" endures existence in a world that physically doesn't have room for her. Even in the cozy and familiar Campfire Girls' tale of "Prairie Warriors," the romantic warrior-women of another future earth have to head for the spaceport in the end. They can only visit genre fantasy-land, there's no place for them to stay.

"Machine Sex" itself, the title story, is an ironic exception to the rule of negation and disengagement. The back-cover blurb calls it a "brilliant parody of cyberpunk"; presumably this description is intended to soothe prospective readers who don't know what the c-word means, but know they don't like it. "Machine Sex" is a dead-pen cyberpunk classic. Girl builds machine, girl gets shafted by the company, girl goes after the cheating big guys. . . . "Angel"—the naked woman at the computer—is metaphorical as all get out. The notorious sensuality of the machines belongs to her completely, user and used, inventor and invented. The repeated image of the sleeping human waif, hand tucked between thighs, is a frame that seems immediately to have flashed subliminally through any cyberpunk text you've ever read. Angel's streetwise garb, dirty white silk skirt over the black leather jacket, isn't the only conscious statement on turning an sf story inside out. But she's also a concrete fictional character, possessing exactly the battered gutter talent and naïve bitterness that this dumb and noir

revenge tragedy requires. The final revelation, when it comes, is less than shocking, but that's the price of the buildup and the age of the reader. For Angel, for every young genius up against the walls, the shock is new.

"Prairie Women," with "Rumours of War," its even slighter coda, could easily spawn a novel, with a sentimental flavor of woodsmoke and women's group. "the white city" belongs to another and (to me) equally insubstantial strand of womenfolk sci-fi: a potent but somehow flimsy narrative from a dream notebook. "Death and Morning" is baroque futuristic chant about a boy-sex-slave, orgasmic violence, palace revolution. "By Their Taste Shall Ye Know Them" is the cleanest of in the book, neat and gruesome: and the story, along with "Machine Sex," that I would hope to see anthologized. My particular favorite however is the last in the collection. A first person narrative of a deracinated space/time traveller, it concerns the promise of recovery that this century must make to itself, in order to go on living. Dorsey is Canadian, and "Willows" is a very Canadian story, about the urban fringe and the wilderness, about divided cultures, divisive language and feeling like a tourist in your own country. It's also a story that illustrates well the clear overview of genre that can make the outsider's position a positive advantage; and which offsets, in the multivalence of its metaphor, an affectionate conclusion to the argument . . . "In the end, the broken

branches have been forgiven." That's a nice idea.

To become the permanent opposition, never in office, maybe the inevitable fate of feminist sci-fi of this uncompromising variety: it's not a failing, but the nature of the beast. Joanna Russ came to the same conclusion years ago, and there are echoes of her writing all through *Machine Sex*. Critics make connections that writer never dreamed of. For all I know Candace Dorsey has never read Joanna Russ, and wouldn't recognize any of my reading of her own work. But whatever she meant by it, certainly these are the stories of an outsider who accepts her position and makes a virtue of it: even a temptation. The chill and silence of the winter forest in "Black Dog" draws the reader in. The writer dwells lovingly on the allure of retirement, resignation, a fallow season that never ends. A skilled artist, deeply uneasy with the whole crude business of narrative rhetoric, the strongest argument she presents against her own thesis is the beauty of her prose style: if science fiction is so hopeless where did these stories come from? This is a fine, thoughtful and interesting collection. If you can find it, you should buy it.

Gwyneth Jones, author of *Divine Endurance*, lives in Brighton, England.

Christopher Hinz Subject: Object

When the terror thrust me back into the swakened world; when the cerebral functions of the consciousness reincorporated, giving dimension to the room, the bed, the doorway, the darkness; at that moment, I thought to go the other way. When the fevered claws of the nightmare hung in the air above me, raking my body with drivers, threatening the fragility of a awareness; when the nightmare forced me toward the parted gates of idiosyncratic hell, imperiling all manner of cultured comprehension and objectivity, I thought to go the other way.

I was twenty-five years old. I was living in Los Angeles, doing primal therapy. I had suffered terrible nightmares since childhood; for a number of years in my early twenties—during a period of severe emotional isolation marked by steady drug use—the nightmares shattered sleep three or four times a week. Coming to California to enter therapy at Arthur Janov's Primal Institute had been a desperation measure. Prior to therapy, my days had alternated between spates of deep depression broken by intense manic periods; the nights brought disintegrative excursions into terror. Life was fast becoming unlivable.

After many months of therapy, the primal process helped me to achieve a degree of clarity. I descended through many layers of my own distorted consciousness, bringing long-repressed emotional pains to the forefront. I experienced agonies that had been cloistered inside for years, relearned lessons that my body once had known as essential truths. Such rediscoveries, in retrospect, seem quaint and simplistic: to cry when it hurts, or exhibit rage when one is angry—in short, to feel the entire range of human emotions—not exactly extraordinary concepts. But for one whose pains had driven him far away, whose pains had forced him to forget, such rediscoveries were all of the world.

As therapy continued, as I learned how to deal with the reality of my emotions, the frequency of the nightmares decreased. Yet they did not depart entirely, and the terrors that occasionally returned to haunt my nights blistered consciousness with an intensity as virulent as ever before.

And so one night, trusting my feelings and the validity of the primal process, I thought to go the other way.

I awoke from a nightmare, shuddering. The dark portal, steaming with fear, lay wide open; my private hell was poised to engulf me. I had ascended the chain of consciousness to the point where my perception recognized the bedroom as being as real as the fear that lay on the other side of that dark door. At that moment, on that threshold, choice was possible.

I did not run from the portal (turn on the light, read a book, watch TV, focus consciousness away from the terror) nor did I enter that door to confront my fears. By this time, I recognized this latter course—the

almost reverent externalization of one's fears into demons to be faced, forces with which to be reckoned—could lead only to ultimate fragmentation. At best, fighting evil spirits could serve as a temporary catharsis; at worst, it could lead to deeper madness.

Instead, I closed my eyes and allowed the objectivity of intellect to disintegrate. I literally fell into the feeling, permitting the fear to overwhelm me. And the fear carried me away, to a place and time that had been forgotten: a buried life, a pre-conceptual environment alive with the roar of a thousand engines. It was an enveloping journey into a milieu long repressed, into a place of mortal fear beyond the reassuring walls of "objective" intellect. I knew then, as I know now, that it was a fragments' excursion into the pain-shrouded odyssey of my own birth.

Today, a dozen-plus years after I first thought to go the other way, I write science fiction.

There would seem to be, within that corner of the literary universe known as sf (but certainly not limited to this genre), a wide-ranging belief that certain novels are demonstrably better than others, that specific conglomerations of thought and feeling, expressed in the medium of spaced units known as words, are, in quantifiable ways, superior to other such conglomerations. This presumption of objectivity, which I believe promotes itself in a consensual, largely subliminal way (thus sanctifying the myth of rating systems for novels), also extends to shorter works; i.e., those thought/feeling aggregates which utilize 39,999 words or less. But so as not to get too lost in nebulous definitions, I'll confine this essay to that stream of expression popularly referred to as the sf novel.

However, let us briefly slip out of that stream in order to examine two of the greatest science fiction novels in the history of the form: *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula K. Le Guin, and *The Results on Venus*, by Carey Rockwell (Book 5 of the Tom Corbett, Space Cadet series).

I read Le Guin's masterpiece in the 1970s, shortly before I entered primal therapy. *The Dispossessed*, with its dialectic vision of two worlds—Urras, Annarees—bridged by the deeds of the physicist Shevek, offered a beautiful dual refraction of cultures. Urras, where one could own everything, Annarees, where one could own nothing, seemed to represent opposing aspects of the human condition. Together, these worlds liberated and vitalized a center, a place where thought and feeling could flow together, where the institutionalized madness of post-Vietnam America might coalesce with the passionate depths found in each and every human being. At that point in my life, *The Dispossessed* spoke to me with particular acumen.

And years later, upon rereading, the book maintains its intensity.

Its multiple juxtapositions—a static culture hinged against one which evolves, technocracy versus bio-wisdom, going away in order to find the way home—all this, played out against Shevek's passions and his invention of a device which makes possible instantaneous communication, make for that rarest of science fiction novels: one whose elements are exquisitely woven, adroitly balanced, and maintained by the dignity of human scale throughout. *The Dispossessed* is, from beginning to end to beginning, a beautiful book.

The Robots on Venus, credited to Carey Rockwell, was one of eight juveniles based on the early 1950s television show, *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*. These books were my first excursions into the universe of science fiction, encountered when I was about eight or nine years old. And the fifth book of the series immediately became my favorite.

In *The Robots on Venus*, Tom Corbett and his fellow cadets, Roger and Astro, journey to Venus in order to spend their hard-earned vacation hunting dinosaurs in the primordial jungles. While tracking a particularly nasty *Tyrannosaurus*, the trio stumble into a plot by slave-owning Venusian colonists to attack the Solar Alliance and destroy the peace. Later, the cadets together with Major Conner (the hard-bitten and crusty, but heart-of-gold Solar League officer), reenter the jungles, ostensibly to finish off the now-wounded *Tyrannosaurus*, but actually to find the hidden rebel base. They kill the raging dinosaur, but are captured and taken to the colonists' secret facility. Tom Corbett escapes, returns to Venusport, and provides the Solar Alliance with much-needed intelligence data on the rebels. An all-out assault is launched.

The Robots on Venus climaxes with a spectacular space battle. The rebellion is crushed, Tom himself corrals the rebel leader, and the cadets end their vacation as heroes.

Human consciousness, I believe, is of a tripartite nature. We are each composed of three distinct aspects: the physical, the emotional, and the intellectual. Obviously, this is not a new idea. Representations exist throughout the world; many of our myths ooze with tripartite assumptions. Body/spirit/mind permeates the history of numerous religions and cultures.

Neurologically, there is a great deal of evidence to indicate that the human brain is a three-tiered composite mechanism, consisting of, in ascending phylogenetic order, the most ancient spinal net (the physical, the body), the limbic system (the emotional, the spirit), and the most recent development, the neocortex (the intellectual, the mind).

This concept of tripartite consciousness allows us to perceive and define *intellect* and *intelligence* as two very different qualities. *Intellect*, that faculty of consciousness capable of knowing and understanding—the capacity which permits us to be "objective"—arises strictly from the neocortex, the third and phylogenetically newest aspect of our three-tiered brains. *Intelligence*, however—the capacity for learning and feeling and reasoning—can be seen as the product of free-flowing interplay among all three levels of human consciousness. *Intelligence* is a holistic quality, arising from the harmony of our physical, emotional, and intellectual selves.

When I first thought to go the other way, when I initially plunged into the turmoil of my nightmare, allowing *intellect* to disintegrate in order to gain access to primal feelings, I came to realize the true fragility of this third tier of consciousness. Today, I often perceive *intellect* more in terms of a defense mechanism able to prevent the proper harmonious interaction of body/spirit/mind, rather than as some bastion of objective analysis. *Intellect* exists not so much as an intrinsic quality separating humans from the so-called lower animals than as a specific instrumentality capable of blocking us off from the depths of our own conscious selves. In short, *intellect* is a powerful survival mechanism, which, among other things, enables human beings to function with a great deal of repressed emotional and/or physical pain.

This means to me that one of *sf*'s most consensually cherished views is false: namely, the ethnocentrism that regards *intellect* as a development heralding human superiority over all other known life forms. Clearly, the *intellect*'s capacity for enabling a person to step beyond the immediacy of the physical and the emotional, to perceive the world in an "objective" manner, does separate us from other organisms. But does it make us superior in any fundamental way? I would say no. Examples of *intellectually*-generated malfeasance abound: twentieth-

century humanity's gross destruction of much of its ecological infrastructure is alone a transgression that should make us wary of applying the word "superior" to ourselves.

My *intellectual* self perceives *The Dispossessed* as being a better book than *The Robots on Venus*, recognizing that Le Guin, with her graceful voice, more precisely integrates elements, delineates subtleties of character, and blends a vision of life into a unified structure. Judging from this level of consciousness, *The Dispossessed* offers a complexity of riches far beyond the range of any mere space cadet adventure.

But my *intelligence*—that consequence of three-tiered holistic unity—sees a blatant fallacy in allowing *intellect* to be such an arbiter. As such, I must ultimately look upon *The Robots on Venus* and *The Dispossessed* as incomparable—apples and oranges, spatially and temporally separate. Many years ago, the tripartite consciousness of a young boy found joy in the pages of a Tom Corbett novel. Much later, another consciousness found clarifying refuge with Urras, Annaree. And today, still a third consciousness composes this essay. Although these multiple holisms are all different aspects of the same I, my point is that one's tripartite consciousness remains forever in motion, and thus, immutably bound to the laws of relativity. I hurtle across space/time and the novels that I read must be perceived always in relationship to that motion.

Furthermore, it might be suggested that the "objectivity" of intellect is *not* a product of constant motion—just the opposite, in fact. *Intellect* can be seen as an artificiality for separating ourselves from the spatio/temporal flow of tripartite consciousness, for denying relativity. *Intellect* permits us to take a step back from ourselves, to remove ourselves from the stream so that we might see where we're going, or where we've been. And it is precisely that "removal from the stream"—that process of the "objective"—which often tends to make us overlook *intellect*'s fundamental relationship to the greater universe.

The richness of a reading experience, to a large extent, remains directly proportional to the degree in which an *intellectually*-input text engages our *emotions*—our second tier of consciousness. The transcendent power of a novel often blooms from an author's ability to coalesce thought and feeling. Nevertheless, I would suggest that any value system used to compare or critique novels still emanates primarily from our *intellectual* selves. Reading a book may involve two levels of consciousness, but that process of objectivization, our ability to conceptualize and compare texts (which encompass our emotional responses to such texts), remains essentially formulated out of the gray matter of the neocortex.

It might also be pointed out that the dichotomy of objectivity/objectivity is not a new debate, that those who read, write and critique *sf* are, in part, aware of the distinctions and that the community at large appropriately differentiates. To some extent, these are valid points, and I do admit to a slight sensation of pouncing upon paper tigers. Yet in our contemporary world, where the deliberate muddling of "opinion" and "fact" sets political agendas and is often utilized to maintain the disparity of body/spirit/mind so that *intellectually*-formulated visions of profit and progress can be enhanced, those who would make an extra effort to distinguish dogma from phenomenon may, by example, promote a deeper clarity. A society composed of tripartite-harmonious human beings might well remain a utopian dream, but I for one see it as an ideal worthy of aspiration.

And finally, I do not intend this essay to be a diatribe against *intellectual* faculties per se, nor to suggest that any critical comparison is necessarily invalid and should be abandoned. Germane to *sf*, I believe that there are restricted uses for that thing called "objectivity," as long as there is mutual recognition of criteria, explicit establishment of parameters within which any such comparisons are to be made, and a common understanding of the inherent limitations. Bound by the tier of *intellectual* consciousness, specific frameworks for the correlation of *sf* novels are applicable. The "objectivity" of intellect only assumes intolerable dimensions when it purports to sever itself totally from the grander macrocosm of human subjectivity. ▴

Christopher Hinz's most recent novel is *The Paratwa. He lives in Reading, Pennsylvania.*

Dragon Press Awards Forum

The Awards Controversy

Our organization, though young, has grown up a lot in the last three years since we started giving our coveted and respected awards. We are now the biggest, if not the best (and who's to say we're not the best) writers' organization in category fiction. We have learned from the mistakes of others, been even more generous in our membership requirements than the other pro organizations and as a result have more professionals, including crossovers from all the other categories, working in our field than any others. Hey, the fantastic is universal and isn't all writing imaginative Right.

But we're not done yet. We're just getting started. Our market newsletter, the most popular publication we offer our membership, has grown to thirty-six closely-packed pages every month, allowing every member access equally to all markets—and we do ferret out those markets, don't we. Every one of you may become full-time professional writers and I hope you have the drive and stamina to accomplish this. You are now a card-carrying professional and everyone knows it when you say you're a member. I remember the long, anxious months I wrote and wrote and wrote before I made it and I want you to know that I believe you will too. And you know we have a number of awards for young writers for you to look forward to.

We have been considering those awards carefully. You know we have given a passel of Grand Master awards to those old men (Asimov, Leibler, Nottom) who wrote famous stuff decades ago, when we weren't even a publishing category, just part of fiction (and got lost in the stores). And that we have nominated every bestselling book we could fit onto the ballot to show that we respect popular excellence, not just literary frills. And that, my fellow professionals, has given our award credibility! From the very first year, publishers were encouraged to—and did start to—use a tiny image of our distinctive reptilian award and its name on mass market covers. But let me stress, as one of the founding members and as one concerned with making reputations and careers, that I have always spoken out in favor of more categories for younger writers.

I was once a member of the SFWA, when they used to be top organization, back before the market grew up. And I watched through the seventies and eighties how they mucked up the Nebula Awards. It's been nearly ten years since they even nominated one of the bestselling books in their field to their ballot. Asimov and Clarke and Anthony and McCaffrey may be old, but they sell because they remind everyone of good books read years ago. That's real popular quality, I'd say. And that's why they all get on our ballot, along with King and Koonce and, and—but I don't need to tell you this. What I do want to tell you is that they create an environment of quality success that makes every one of you more respectable, that legitimizes you. I know that most of you are only part-time writers, but you all aspire to the big time, the full-time. And we have plans to help you.

We have had a series of meetings and solicited expert advice, gotten reports written and received a number of letters. We simply have to maintain the high profile and credibility that the awards have so quickly gained, that is so crucially important to those of you who can't join those of us on the bestseller lists quite yet. It helps you in the long run. And we know who you are and truly value your work and your ambitions right now, believe me. Your commitment and your dues are what makes this organization, and this market, too, strong. We produce, all of us, and readers, more every month, have to be made to consume. I am committed to building the market, strengthening the market, selling the publishers on selling us, using the awards to ensure that we are all better distributed, better sold. We are writers and we have to stick together, in supporting the proud and lonely task to putting words on paper and making damn sure that they are published democratically, so that every reader everywhere can buy them. I am not so deluded as to think that one writers work is inherently more valuable, more worth reading than any other's in this field. Fame is fickle, Dame Fortune chooses some of us for large sales, big money, all the rest, but every one

of you who writes and is published is potentially going to have your moment, and our awards are going to be made to help as many as possible, as much as possible, share and share alike. There are many kinds of quality and every one of them should be rewarded and awarded. We'll get there, I promise you. I know that the larger we grow and the more awards we give, the closer we get to equal opportunity for every writer, and that's the kind of fairness my administration really means. Category fiction is really what people want to read, the bestseller lists prove it, and we will fill that need.

—The President Elect

An Open Letter to Our Friends

Dear Friends:

We know you know who you are, and we are delighted that you are now a member of our Esteemed and Much-Honored Organization. As you probably know (because we repeat it at every Organization function and mention it in every Organization mouthpiece), we have a long and esteemed history since we were founded recently. After a long talk with our Esteemed Man Of Letters Founder and First President, and months of reading and publishing letters in an open forum, we have recently made some changes to our membership policies and awards.

As of this date, we state publicly that anyone who wants to join and pay membership dues can be a member, but not just anyone. The American Society is open to members of all fifty states of North America (who may then form regional organizations with their own sub-rules). We are only open to writers, editors, assistants, artists, and people who think they might someday like to be one of the above. Also, only people who know a password and can convince us to let down the rope ladder will be allowed in.

This means you.

Once a year—or possibly more frequently, if nobody's watching—we will be granting an Award, the inimitable SPQR, a life-like graven image of Saint Pugsley, martyr, by artist (and Member) Geoffrey Hartwell (each one incorporating a relic). But recently, in response to popular request and many more letters of discussions, we have felt that we need to change the award rules.

From now on, only members in good standing whose membership checks haven't bounced (even though we all understand how difficult it is to make a living while the Evil Nasty All-Around Awful Publishers cruelly mistreat us) will be eligible to win awards, although any work can be nominated.

Only works that have been published, will be published, or are deserving of publication will be eligible. Any work may be considered a work, and thus eligible.

Recommendations will be made open and public, since the people who count the nominations would just tell everyone anyway. This means that if you, Our Friends, don't nominate us when we publish anything, we'll be able to call you and ask you why not. In order to keep up with technology, nominations can now be made via computer, but to make sure that nothing gets lost, we ask everyone nominating by this process to clear such nominations with the author first (preferably via net). Another new rule is our special 12-month rule; by this innovation, nominations proceed as per usual, but authors are now allowed to nag their friends about nominations (or lack thereof) for up to twelve months (or one year, whichever comes first).

Authors may defer award nominations for up to six years or as long as it takes to accumulate enough nominations from Our Friends to make the final ballot.

Regional sub-awards are encouraged to not call themselves the SPQR Award.

We feel these new rules will make everybody happy and ensure that the works that win awards will truly, truly be deserving of greater sales.

—The Awards Committee

Report from the Committee for Promotion

Whereas a number of publishing houses have reported a decay in the influence of the SPQR Award upon sales, and whereas an increasing percentage of our ever-increasing membership is having difficulties meeting personal financial goals, and whereas this organization has always stood for the greatest goods to the greatest number, we, the members of the Committee for Promotion submit to the general membership of the organization the following recommendations:

(1) We must establish that a work of literature can age, can deteriorate physically and psychologically. We must teach publishers, booksellers, collectors and readers to discard old books and elderly authors like they discard old cars and refrigerators, in order to make way for the new. This will benefit the younger members of our organization, and will, we think, help to attract new members. (It was suggested that books be required to have "sell by" dates on them like milk does, but the consensus of the committee was that this is at present unworkable. Anyidea? Also, we could present our awards quarterly, or even monthly to encourage sellers to rotate stock as each new round of awards is announced.)

(2) To counter the unfortunate negative publicity some of our members are experiencing, particularly in *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, we recommend that all members be required to sign a loyalty oath not to criticize any other members' works in print. Given the grave economic circumstances of some important members, we recommend that this policy take effect ASAP to prevent any further financial damage. (Want to help out? We need someone to translate the words "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all" into Latin, so that it can be integrated into the design for the new organizational seal printed below the motto "*Memento mori* (Latin).")

(3) Given the high cost of market research and the inability of both publishers and individual members to afford such research, we took the liberty of commissioning a study from the medical school at Miskatonic University. A year's worth of review copies were translated into Amelcan, and then read to a specially selected group of signing gorillas. Questionnaires were then administered to the survivors. By this method, the researchers created an outline of the plot necessary to maximize the sales. We had initially intended to offer this outline free to all members, but due to cost over-runs are forced to charge \$4.95 per copy; copies can be obtained by sending a check made out to the organization along with your SASE to the recording secretary.

(4) We recommend that the award be redesigned for the following reasons:

We have had many complaints about its appearance, and frankly, it is the unanimous opinion of the committee that it's time for our beloved Saint Pugsley (SPQR Award) to have a face lift. (Many members have complained that they feel it is bad for business to have an award modelled on a lizard.)

We did a study, and we saved the organization money by having the committee members administer the study themselves. Initially, we gave the award a more decorative surface—assortments of colors as well as floral, paisley, and plaid patterns were used. Unfortunately, among our sample interviewees (shoppers at five malls in central New Jersey), all versions of the award had a very low approval rating. The committee's favorite was the paisley Pugsley, which unfortunately met with very, very low public approval. The most highly rated pattern was a pink and green plaid, which tended to evoke giggles, a response that was considerably less than optimum.

We then took a more radical approach. After considerable discussion among the officers and committee members, we rejected the current design entire (although our respect for the venerated Pugsley never lags) and commissioned sketches. After testing reactions to the sketches in grocery stores and shopping malls, we recommend that the award be in the shape of a semi-nude woman. This design rated most highly in both interest and arousal. (Full nudity was suggested, but seemed to elicit anxiety and boredom from some female interviewees. It was also suggested, quite loudly, by one woman writer on the committee that a significant portion of the membership might find such a design offensive.)

(5) Once the award is redesigned, we recommend that publishers be encouraged to put a picture of the award on the cover the book of any award winner. This will insure increased sales of our winners, by insuring a semi-nude woman on the cover. As most books already feature one, we do not expect any resistance from the publishing industry. (We are taking applications for models from members in good standing.)

(6) We recommend that the awards be open exclusively to members of the organization. After all, we do all the work. Why should the fruits of our labors—our hours of reading, our voluminous recommendations lists, all our lobbying and politicking, agonizing, and of course our research—go to some writer no one's ever heard of who hasn't even paid dues? We can't keep scale from working for publishers, but hey, that doesn't mean we have to give them awards.

(7) Finally, we've heard complaints from publishers that a small minority of the time good products—books that give all the right signals, not just a few of them, but every last one!—sometimes just plain don't sell, and no one can say why. We believe that labor should help out business, so we hired some private detectives to follow book buyers around. The conclusion we've come to is frightening: Book buyers are irrational, unreliable, cheap-skate liars, and furthermore, they aren't as smart as we are. They are unable to process information fast enough or in the right way.

We referred this problem to the Sterling Committee for Speculative Technology and World Improvement. One member of that committee passed along to us a scholarly article which modestly proposed a technological solution. In that article, its author suggested:

If consumers are too naturally stupid to behave in the way the computer does, let us provide them with artificial intelligence to enable them to do so. I am informed by scientists . . . that this is not only technologically possible, but long overdue. With the surgical implantation of one small processor chip . . . consumers should not only be able to live up to the models that have been developed to describe their behavior, but they should behave in a much more predictable, logical, and infallible fashion than is currently the case. No more self-indulgent spurges, overly generous gifts of love, non-nutritional eating, ignored advertising, or lamentable susceptibility to well-crafted personal sales appeals. These benefits are so self-evident in the consumer's best interest that consumers will hardly need to be convinced to acquire the requisite package of artificial intelligence.¹

Writers and publishers should work together to implement this system as quickly as possible. If our organization takes the lead, then our award will remain forever one of the programmed signals that consumers will look for. No longer will the style to which we wish to become accustomed be endangered by the whims of ornery, manic-depressive Oxy-10-consuming little creeps who don't know what they should want to read.

We, the members of the Committee for Promotion trust that the implementation of the foregoing recommendations would be of benefit not only to the members of this organization, but to Mankind as a whole and humanity as well.

—The Committee

Please enter your vote and
return to Dragon Press Awards
Forum, P.O. Box 78, Picas-
antville, NY 10570.

Yes _____
I Agree _____
Definitely _____

¹A Modest Proposal for Creating Verisimilitude in Consumer-Information-Process Models and Some Suggestions for Establishing a Discipline to Study Consumer Behavior" by Russell W. Belk. In *Philosophical and Radical Thought in Marketing*, edited by A. Pust Firat, Nikhilesh Dhotakia, and Richard P. Bagazzi. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1987, p. 362.

Screed (letters of comment)

MORE ABOUT TEHANU

Elisabeth Vonarburg, Chicoutimi, Canada

I'd like to comment on the *Tehanu* review by Tatiana Keller (Issue #28). I apologize in advance if my English is not up to par: I am not a native English-speaking person.

Readers always project themselves in the books they read, i.e. not only do they project who they are, life (in)experience, education, fantasies and all, but they also have a lot of assumptions about the genre (if it is a "genre book"), the author (if s/he is a well-known one), the book itself if it is part of a series. *Tehanu* is a case in point, as it falls in all three categories.

I haven't read exactly the same book as your reviewer (which is to be expected in any case!). But what struck me was that I didn't agree any more with a female reader's viewpoint (in that case) than with a recent male reviewer's viewpoint (in *Foundation*, if my memory serves me well) which presents some troubling similarities with that of your reviewer. This set me to thinking.

I had the same reaction as your female reviewer, in fact, when I read the review made by the *Foundation* reviewer: was Le Guin really giving in to her supposed feminist critics, was she trying to patch things up in *Tehanu*? I could not believe it of her. And I was relieved after reading the novel, as it is not what I see in the book.

Good writers usually don't take prescriptive stances when writing, I think. They don't write pamphlets, and don't make amends according to whatever Political Line this or that group consider True—in the case of a woman writer, the Feminist Party Line (the idea of a Feminist Party Line seems like the very opposite of what Feminism means to me, anyway!). I would be amazed if Le Guin had any agendas. She was (and is) a woman writer in a field where few women were writing (still are, as far as I am concerned), and she is a real, evolving human being, who has learned a lot between the time when she wrote the Earthsea Trilogy and the time she wrote *Tehanu*. As any writer does, she felt the need to delve deeper into an imaginary world, and a story, important to her, and which her own evolution as a person has allowed her to understand more clearly. How could anyone take her to task for not being the Keeper of others' so-called Truth? And how could anyone take her to task for not being set once and for all in the way she relates to her stories, to herself as a female human being, and to the world at large ("the world" including the literary world, and the Fantasy genre itself)? I think I heard a moralistic tone in your reviewer's comments, which really made me uneasy. I intensely dislike judging people according to their ideological "correctness," and judging writers that way is even more repellant to me (even if it does indeed play a role in the way we react to them).

Now, let's go to the heart of the matter, the book itself. I would like to refute some of your reviewer's allegations.

• *Tenar* refused to wield the same magic power as the male Magies (is there a metaphor of Le Guin herself in there?), and this is not the same as to tell women: "get married, have children, suffer, don't make waves." In fact, as I see it, *Tenar* deliberately chose to share the lives of her sisters, not through "cowardice," but through humility and, yes, maybe, a desire to atone for her past life (which was not that happy and fulfilling anyway! But invested with a sort of power, so...). I can't help seeing in your reviewer's comments the arrogance/blindness of many Occidental feminists who blithely forget that the majority of women in the world at large don't share their "enlightenment," that is, for a big part, their privileges as "have" people. *Tenar* goes back to the ordinary women's world, to live and learn as they do, and suffer what they suffer.

• The women's magic, the women's power, is different from the ritualized, hierarchical men's magic, not inferior to it: it is ignored by men or viewed with contempt by some women themselves, but it is real and potent. Now, that could be argued (are women different from men, and so on), but the given of the book, according to which we must position ourselves to be able to comment properly, is that they are. OK, so they are. This seems to infuriate your reviewer, who

looks like she wants to go and play with the boys on an equal footing. Don't we all? Well, not all. Some, and Le Guin is one, have gone beyond the wish-fulfillment phase in this question of women and power. I suppose *Tehanu* must be very frustrating to people who haven't questioned their love of Fantasy in that light (Power), and to women who still more or less conclusively want a reversal of the Fantasy tropes, or at least an "equal opportunity" at them. I don't remember that your reviewer questioned the very concept of power, did she?

• What really strikes me as thought-provoking in *Tehanu* is that Le Guin goes behind the usual Fantasy scenery (and its related power fantasies). She takes a good, hard look at the status of women in the Fantasy world, and, lo and behold, it is the very status they have in the "real world"—not what we wish it were, but what it still is for the vast majority of women. In *Tehanu*, Le Guin is in fact achieving a deconstruction not only of her own "Earthsea Trilogy" but also of the Fantasy genre (lovingly, though with a bit of melancholy, I think); this is something she had already partly achieved in the trilogy, as far as I am concerned and I rightly remember my reader's reactions at the time; I was twenty-eight or so, and "feministically" not very far, I believe, from where Le Guin was when she wrote it (which goes to delineate my own "reader's biases," of course!).

I could go on (or try to, in my broken English) with a positive "feminist" reading of *Tehanu*, I suppose, but I just found out that Le Guin has done it very well on her own behalf in *Moonrider*! (Pulphouse Publishing).

I'll just say that the other thing that struck me when I read *Tehanu* the first time is the evolution of the figure of the Dragon since the early Earthsea books. In fact, the one thing I had found frustrating when reading them was precisely the Dragon. Ged is afraid of the Dragon, and seeks to master it; he ends up establishing an uneasy truce with it. I didn't quite realize why this made me uneasy. I slowly realized why while reading other books-with-dragons. In Heroic Fantasy, it seems, a lot of male writers tend to see the Dragon as something to be killed or mastered, whereas a lot of female writers tend to see it as a companion or a guide. I was recently giving a writing and drama workshop to pre-adolescents, and there were a lot more girls than boys. I used the elements in one of my own stories featuring a friendly (though enigmatic) Dragon, and let them run away with them as they pleased. All the boys but one killed the Dragon, and all the girls went to live with it in its cave, being either its surrogate mother or its daughter (two of the girls' Dragons were female).

So of course I was absolutely delighted when reading the passages of *Tehanu* where Le Guin tells the story of the ancient relationships between Dragons and humans; and even more when *Therru*, the victimized woman-child, is revealed as the only one who can speak directly to the Dragon—which even Ged could not do. Hasn't your reviewer seen that? All she seems to have read in the *Therru* character is pusillanimity on Le Guin's part: the next Archmage might be a woman but we are not sure. And then she goes on to lament the fact that it is not certain and that the novel doesn't really end satisfactorily. This reproach seems typical to me, if one thinks in terms of what Le Guin has called "the hunter's story," which is the "male story," aiming at the heart of the subject and "finishing it," closing the story on itself to ensure its proper consumption. But as for me, the ending of *Tehanu* is satisfactory indeed because it doesn't give in to the usual wish-fulfillment desire of the reader (and especially of the female reader). I loved *The Farthest Shore* because of its "non-resolution," because Ged's power is not the last word of it. In fact, before the story goes back into legend (in the last two paragraphs), the last thing we see is "... the dragon [flying] between the sunlight and the sea lit it out of sight." I could go on and expound on the symbolical values of this mythical creature flying between sunlight ("Reason, the Father, the Male Order") and the sea ("Affect, the Mother, the Female (dis)Order")... But I won't; this letter is already far too long.

So, indeed, the next Archmage might well be a woman, but what

is really important, I think, is the relationship between Theru and the Dragon. The Dragon is a deep and strong archetype. Women and men must learn how to deal with that potent image, each in their different ways, and indeed an echo of the battle may be heard in Fantasy stories, as I remarked above. I feel that the Dragon archetype takes a very meaningful value when it is treated in women's fiction as it is in this Le Guin novel. Le Guin herself seems to be of that opinion. I quote her essay "Children, Women, Men and Dragons" in *Monad*:

The dragon, a spiritual being, wild, fierce, winged, escapes and denies and destroys the old world.

The dragon, a speaking spirit, wise, winged, embodies a new order, a greater freedom.

And the child who is our care, the child we have betrayed, the child we betray, is our guide; she leads us to the dragon. She is the dragon.

And of course in *Tehanu* the child is the female child, as Dragonspeak is the Mother's tongue, as the Dragon, indeed, is this primordial female image, the Mother's.

But in *Earthsea*, wasn't the child Ged? I think that it was, and that Theru is in many ways his female double. Ged (and the reader identified with Ged, be it a male or female reader) accepted his dark *Other Self* in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, but he's had yet to meet the *Other*; in *Tehanu* Theru/Le Guin enables Ged/us to do just that (and the *Other* is us if we are female . . . isn't that nifty too?), thus giving the whole series, as far as this reader's subjectivity is concerned, an appropriate "ending": a completeness.

Thank you for putting up with my English. And thank you for putting out such a good magazine!

Tatiana Keller, Seattle, Washington

[In response to Ms. Vonarburg, above]

To respond to your specific observations. While I agree that in the ideal world "good writers do not take prescriptive stances," this is generally not borne out in reality, as Le Guin herself proved in *The Word for World is Forest*, *The Eye of the Heron*, and *"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,"* to name her most unmistakably prescriptive works. Other excellent writers with deliberately, intentionally prescriptive stances include Joanne Russ, Pat Murphy, Suzy Charles, Connie Willis, Joan Vinge, Madeleine L'Engle, Vonda MacIntyre, and Jane Yolen, to name only a very few. (Notice they are all women.) In fact, one of the implicit purposes of fantasy is to provide moral instruction, just as do the fairy tales. It patterns itself after science fiction, while a more free-form subgenre, frequently assumes the same responsibility, if only in the role of social conscience. Le Guin has a long history of didacticism: this is (in my opinion) neither good nor bad; it's a fact.

Now—as you say, to the heart of the matter.

Yipes. Why should Tenuar "atone" for her past life, "which was not that happy or fulfilling anyway," to quote you? "But invested with a sort of power, so . . ." So, what? So because she had power, even though it made her unhappy, she should atone for her unhappy power by becoming powerless and unhappy? I'm sorry, I don't comprehend this reasoning at all. Refusing to use one's power generally results in victimization (as Tenuar illustrates). That is not synonymous with humility. Humble acceptance of a spiritual gift, e.g. psychic power, usually engenders the urge to train it to be used properly for the greater good. That is what, in *Earthsea*, the male wizards did with their abilities. Why then should Tenuar do penance for hers?

As to being a blindly arrogant American woman, it is certainly true that societies still struggling for survival have more rigidly structured gender roles. However, most traditional cultures also provide strong spiritual roles, which may or may not be gender-specific. If we are to speak of the "ordinary woman's world," which world do we mean? The Native American tribal world? They have shamans. The Central American world? They have curanderas. The Hindu world? They have female mystics. These are women who may wed and give birth, but also wield spiritual power. If you mean

the Western European post-Christian world which includes America, in that world women are generally forced to choose between power and family life—and are often socially ostracized if they choose power.

Now possibly you are seeing Tenuar as rejecting celibacy, and rejecting power because in *Earthsea* it was synonymous with celibacy. Tenuar wanted to live in the "real world," i.e. bear children, have a fulfilling sexual relationship, have close friendships (wizards did tend to keep to themselves). Perhaps this is what Le Guin was trying to say, through Tenuar. If that is the case, however, isn't it a more positive confirmation of these values to provide Tenuar with the joys, as well as the burdens, of womanhood? Nowhere do we see any hint of delight, even of affection, between her and her erstwhile husband; her children appear to have brought her more disappointment than pleasure. And we learn, toward the end of the book, that it was Ged she wanted all along . . . and so, apparently, it didn't matter whom she married since she couldn't have the man she longed for.

This kind of thinking, in my opinion, is pretty hard to defend. Many women (and men for that matter) are married off against their will, and are forced to make the best of it, but Tenuar had a choice. To commit herself to a man she apparently had little feeling for, and then go through the actions of playing dutiful wife, was not only disrespectful of herself, but of him. How might he have felt had he known that in her heart she was devoted to another? Didn't he deserve, as do all of us, more honesty from a mate? No matter who we are—ditch diggers, typists, professors, farmers, or novelists—we deserve to be treated well. Both he and Tenuar (and Ged, too, who was part of this triangle, albeit a silent, aloof member) deserved truth in their interactions.

About power. Well yes, I did question the concept of power quite at length. Please reread the passages on Light and Dark, and on patriarchal reinterpretation of ancient pre-Christian religions. You say that I "want to play with the boys on an equal footing." But Le Guin raised that issue, not I. She created Seren—who died because she exercised power equal to men's—and Tenuar, whose power was greater than Ged's but who refused to train it—and Theru, who apparently has the same capabilities. The very presence of these women then catalyzed the discussion of how they should be dealt with—once again, Le Guin chose to follow that theme herself. Had she never posed the question, there would be no argument with her answer. The fact that she asks it over and over, and cannot seem to respond to herself, might indicate some anxiety or ambivalence. But in my advocating that those girls who wish it might have access to education similar to the boys', I am simply 1) agreeing with Ged, whose prescription for Tenuar was to offer her the same training he had had (it was Tenuar who threw it away) and 2) presenting the logical solution to what Le Guin apparently sees as a very complicated problem. This points out another element of *Tehanu* that distressed me. The first three books seemed truly written from the heart, so to speak: they had a clarity and honesty that spoke of great vision. In that vision, Le Guin (speaking with Ged's voice) offered Tenuar shelter and education with his old teacher. But in this fourth book, which seems to sweep away or undo so much of the earlier beauty, and which smacks in so many ways of a much more consciously lecturing attitude, Le Guin counteracts her younger voice and, speaking through Tenuar, turns her back on Ged's offer. It was this willing and intentional misdeed of personal power—and in the name of frustrated love, of all things!—that seemed to strike so deeply at the very right of women to exist as powerful beings.

Furthermore, in its disrespect to women, the book is also profoundly disrespectful of men. I mentioned in the review that every male in the novel is evil in some way, except Ged and Fan the weaver, who are powerless. Where is the honesty and clarity of the earlier books? Most of her characters were male—some good, some bad, most flawed in some way, but human, lovable, believable. What has happened in *Tehanu*? It is appalling, and greatly saddening. The same complaint was made of Alex Haley's *Roots* when it reached television—I don't know if the novel suffered from the same disability, but several reviewers complained of the miniseries that its effectiveness was actually marred and impeded by the relentless slant toward black rectitude and white pelfry.

On the dragon, yes, Theru could speak to the dragon. I saw that coming from the first paragraph on dragons. Yes, it was beautifully done. I think it could have been developed much more, but then that would be demanding a "hunter's" story, I guess. (I actually am not particularly partial to tidy endings; I like a little ambiguity. A little.

Reading a novel that feels like it demands a sequel, however, gives me a strange sense of disproportion.)

Well, maybe we can continue this discussion in person if you make it to Westercon in Vancouver, B.C.

Work in Progress

A Bibliographic Checklist of First Editions, by L. W. Currey

Draft. Revised 2/91

*indicates entry not seen

OCTAVIA E[STELLE] BUTLER

b. 1947

ADULTHOOD RITES. [New York]: Warner Books, [1988].

Boards with cloth shelf back. First printing: June 1988/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

CLAY'S ARK. New York: St. Martin's Press, [1984].

Boards. First Edition/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

DAWN. [New York]: Warner Books, [1987].

Boards with cloth shelf back. First Printing: May 1987/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

IMAGO. [New York]: Warner Books, [1989].

Boards with cloth shelf back. First Printing: May 1989/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

KINDRED. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979.

Boards with cloth shelf back. First edition so stated on copyright page.

MIND OF MY MIND. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977.

Boards. First edition so stated on copyright page.

Draft. Revised 2/91

*indicates entry not seen

JOHN CROWLEY

b. 1942

AEGYPT. Toronto • New York • London • Sydney • Auckland: Bantam Books, [1987].

Boards with cloth shelf back. A Bantam Spectra Book/April/. . . /RRDH 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

BEASTS. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976.

Boards. First edition so stated on copyright page.

THE DEEP. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., [1975].

Boards. First edition so stated on copyright page.

ENGINE SUMMER. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979.

Boards. First edition so stated on copyright page.

PATTERNMASTER. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976.

Boards. First edition so stated on copyright page.

SURVIVOR. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978.

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WILD SEED. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980.

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XENOGENESIS [New York]: Guild America Books, [1989].

Boards. No statement of printing on copyright page. First printing does not have a printing code. Reprint. Collects DAWN, ADULTHOOD RITES and IMAGO. Note: Issued by the Science Fiction Book Club.

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Suzy McKee Charnas, Octavia Butler, [and] Joan D. Vinge, [by] Marleen S. Barr, Ruth Salvaggio, [and] Richard Law. *Mercer Island, Washington: Stormont House, Inc., 1986.* Wrappers. First edition so stated on copyright page. Issued as *Stormont Reader's Guide 23.*

LITTLE, BIG. Toronto • New York • London • Sydney • Auckland: Bantam Books, [1981].

Wrappers. A Bantam Book/September 1981/First Edition/. . . /0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page. A Bantam Book 01266-5 (\$8.95).

ALSO: London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1982. Boards. No statement of printing on copyright page. First hardcover edition.

NOVELTY. New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland: A Foundation Book/Doubleday, [1989].

Two issues, no priority: (A) Gray boards stamped in metallic blue with blue cloth shelf back stamped in silver. (B) Wrappers. A Foundation Book 0-385-26347-3 (\$6.95) [not seen]. May 1989/First Edition on copyright page.

Note: This is part of a series of bibliographic checklists of sf and fantasy writers that will update, revise, and expand the standard reference work *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors* by L. W. Currey. For the organizational principles and methodology used in this and future lists, please refer to the introduction to that work. Knowledgeable persons are invited to communicate additions and corrigenda directly to L. W. Currey, Elizabethtown, NY 12832.

Report on the SPQR Awards

Well, it's that time of year again: spring is in the air, asparagus is in season, and the awards ballots have to be filled out. In keeping with our policy of promoting the best in sf (and sf criticism), the staff of *NTRSF* wants to bring you attention to a special award: the SPQR (St. Pugsley's Qovered Relics).

The SPQR is a recently-established award, being given by The Organization Along With All The Others. Membership is automatic if you have read 50 words of sf, horror, fantasy, criticism, reviews or subway ads over the past year; others may join by sending a SAE to the organisation. No stamp required.

We know you've read 50 words of criticism this year; you've gotten this far. And we also will know if anyone doesn't vote for us, since all ballots will be made public. Remember, *NTRSF* includes some of the most powerful people in the sf publishing industry, so unless you want all your books published under the Del Rey imprint—not that we would think about recrimination, but there are only so many manuscripts that can be published in a year. . . .

The rules of eligibility for the SPQR are simple: nominees must be published in English or some reasonable facsimile thereof sometime during a twelve-month period. To avoid concerns about works being published late (or early) in the cycle, the reader is free to choose the twelve months and the publication is free to choose the twelve months which they want to be eligible. We have chosen issues 1, 3, 8, 12, 17, 21 (which included the now-legendary *New York Review of Science Fiction*), 26, 28, 32 (this one), 35, 38, and 51. You may therefore claim you are voting for forthcoming issues. We don't care; we just want the award, a beautiful copper-bottomed crock pot embossed with the image of St. Pugsley, Martyr, in which we can prepare three-bean salads and store peanuts.

We know there are other publications contending in our category (Best Criticism and/or Swimsuit Issue). Yes, *Sports Illustrated* has a greater circulation than we do. But do they publish Chip Delany? Will *Spin* review your next novel? Is *Spy* really funny any more? Does anyone review a book in which he doesn't have a story for *Mystery Scene*?

We know you're tired of awards. Some of you have been making Nebula nominations since this time last year; others are staring at Progress Report #5 from Chicon and wondering which of your friends might have a copy of the rules (published in PR #4; not available to those who joined since October). And those of you voting for the Stoker Awards, facing the prospect of reading all the stories on the Preliminary Ballot, are wondering if there's enough Mylanta in the city. But please—take a moment. Send in your ballot for the SPQR. Be sure to mention us. You probably won't regret it.

—KLH & the editors

(For more shared-world editorials, see page 19.)

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